

The State and Quality of Education in Tanzania: A Reflection

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Abstract

This paper contains reflections on the state and quality of education in Tanzania as the country marks the 50th Anniversary of its national independence and the establishment of the University. The paper reflects candidly in an unorthodox manner to interrogate the serious issues affecting the quality of education in Tanzania for the betterment of the educational system. In the face of heated debates and the concerns of all and sundry over the quality of education, the paper argues that there is a growing awareness that formal education is key to having a competitive edge, promoting a national and institutional reputation, the effective marketing of institutional products and attracting resources, in addition to acting as a fulcrum for rapid national socio-economic and political development, and the production of top class leaders and professionals. On the whole, this soul-searching paper interrogates the question of Tanzania's education quality with a view to suggesting the way forward.

Introduction

Despite efforts to expand access and enhance equality at all levels of education, Tanzania still faces a major crisis in its attempt to enhance the quality of its education system. Although there is overwhelming evidence to suggest there has been a steady decline in quality, there is a general reluctance to accept the truth. Indeed, the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) and Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) results affirm there has been a consistent decline in performance despite many years of implementing the strategic and well-meaning Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) and the Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP) as Tables 1 and 2 illustrate, respectively.

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Table 1: No. of Students Sitting the PSLE, Passing, Selected for Secondary Education

year	No. Sitting Exams			Passed				Selected			
	boys	girls	total	Boys	girls	total	pr %	boys	girls	total	sr %
2005	253361	240585	493946	173645	132291	204936	61.7	103334	93057	196391	64.4
2006	337271	326992	664263	257334	210945	468279	70.5	212165	188846	401011	85.6
2007	396944	376699	773643	248215	170921	419136	54.2	231241	164689	395930	94.5
2008	514167	504200	1017967	307196	229476	536672	52.7	244800	188460	433260	80.7
2009	449446	502624	999070	276083	217250	493333	49.38	247232	198722	445954	90.4
2010	435124	459889	895013	256817	222095	478912	53.51	244644	211696	456350	95.27

Source: MOEVT, Primary Education Directorate

These grim figures notwithstanding, what seems to be most worrying are the *glaring gaps in the knowledge and skills* among the students the country is churning out from its various educational institutions. One can assert that *the nation is now producing graduates, from kindergarten to university level, adorned in gowns, but with very poor language skills, low numerical ability, as well as half knowledge.*

Table 2: Form 4 Examination Results (CSEE) in Percentage by Division in Government and Non-Government Secondary Schools 2005 – 2010

Year	Division						Total Number of Candidates Examined
	I	II	III	IV	Failed	Total %	
2005	5.2	6.5	21.9	55.7	10.7	100	85,292
2006	4.5	6.9	24.3	53.4	10.9	100	85,865
2007	5.1	8.6	21.9	54.7	9.7	100	125,288
2008	3.51	6.37	16.84	56.96	16.31	100	162,855
2009	1.85	4.37	11.63	54.66	27.49	100	248,336
2010	1.3	2.83	7.14	38.9	49.60	100	352,839

Source: Basic Education Statistics in Tanzania (URT, 2010; NECTA Statistics, 2011)

Several factors have contributed to this situation. The first is the country's national and educational policies. Generally, quality education is the ultimate goal of any education policy. In fact, educational policy deals with educational 'ends'- to 'prepare people to contribute to the growth and development of the economy and the political life of the country.

Tanzania has had three clear national policies – capitalism (1961 -1967), socialism and self-reliance (1967- 1985) and liberalisation (Vision 2025 – 1999 – 2024) as major national philosophies. Similarly, it has had correspondingly robust policies guiding its education system since independence. These have ranged from the Policy of Integration (1961 –

1967), Education for Self-reliance Policy (1967 – 1985), and lately the Education and Training Policy (1995), currently under revision.

These educational policies have clearly formulated a set of goals for attaining high quality education. Yet, many institutions are far from realising them. Why? The policy-making process is scrambled—priorities are mixed up. The political regime has yet to acknowledge and publicly declare that education is priority number one, and realise that success in all other sectors, including KILIMO, agriculture, is dependent on a well-educated, literate and ethical community. What has often been overlooked is the truism that the realisation of education policies geared towards high quality education, excellence and perfection is predicated on effective implementation of the curriculum.

Successful implementation of the curriculum—the syllabus institutional programme—requires the presence of a supportive context/environment, the availability and effective use of inputs in teaching and learning, and effective management and supervision, monitoring and evaluation, which will in turn determine the quality of outputs and outcomes.

This reflection focuses on the contextual factors, which are paramount for gaining an understanding of the state and quality of education in Tanzania and what needs to be done to redress the situation. **Contextual Factors** embrace political, economic, legal, demographic, cultural and international conditions.

Political factors. One cannot lose sight of the tremendous efforts made by the Government, since independence, to enhance access at all levels of education (BEST, 2010). Lately, such initiatives have been clearly articulated in PEDP I and II, SEDP I and II, TDMS, and HEDP. These programmes, however, have been uncoordinated within the sector and between sectors, thus lacking coherence. A typical example is the introduction of the competence-based curriculum at primary and secondary levels, which is not matched by parallel changes in the pre-service and in-service training of teachers. As a result, quality suffers. Similarly, the change in the curriculum (2005), hardly five years after the implementation of the PEDP I, which was largely donor-supported, entailed a change in textbooks, thus diminishing gains that had been made in improving the student-textbook ratio. This drastic change was made despite Tanzania not being a very rich country. One, therefore, fails to see the fine seam running from basic to higher education as well as between education and other sectors—agriculture and health - in our striving for high quality education. There were also occasions of political meddling with professionally-set targets in the SEDP. Nevertheless, political will and support are needed for the successful implementation of education programmes.

Similarly there is a counter-productive divide between government bureaucrats and professionals. Many times bureaucrats work collaboratively with experts to develop programmes. Thereafter, there is this mentality, '*Sasa tuachie sisi Serikali tutaifanyia kazi*'. This mentality defeats the whole purpose of partnership, as the government ought to be of the people, by the people and for the people, and no Tanzanian has the right to claim to be more patriotic than the other.

Economic conditions. Tanzania is no longer a classless society. It is currently implementing liberalisation policies that allow the middle and high-income earners to avail themselves of the opportunity for a better education, in better resourced institutions, from kindergarten to university levels. So when one is discussing the quality of education, the first question we need to ask is: who is attending what school and why? What curriculum is being implemented by whom, using what resources, in what type of environment? The government's initiative of expanding enrolment at the college and university level to produce more and better qualified teachers for all schools, as well as building more classrooms and enhancing the supply of textbooks might be instrumental in correcting some of the imbalances.

Legal conditions. The Education Act of 1978 is yet to be revised despite several policy shifts and other major reforms that have been implemented in the education sector from the 1980s to-date. A new Universities Act (2005) was, however, introduced to guide the higher education sub-sector. Currently, the Acts do not contain provisions for holding bureaucrats and institutional leaders accountable and responsible for under-performance. Many in the community complain openly that some bureaucrats and institutional leaders are increasingly becoming more concerned about what they can get from their positions and not what they need to do for the office or institution to enhance performance. As Honourable Nyalali (2011) declared, the main law, constitution, and evidently other old laws, such as the Education Act of 1978, are inadequate and need amending, so that systems and institutions can take to task those who are irresponsible and all those engaged in corrupt practices and unlawful acts, as well as those who are lazy. What is important is for the party and government bureaucracy to be ready to take action and remedy the situation.

Demographic conditions. Two issues are of relevance here. First is class size. Whereas some institutions enjoy favourable classes at the primary and secondary education levels – 1:20 – others have large classes of 1:35/90>. At the universities, lecture theatres for 1,000 are being built on several campuses to accommodate the increasingly large numbers of students. I will return to this point in a subsequent section, as class size has a bearing on the use of effective teaching and learning strategies.

Cultural conditions. Community levels of loving education have a great bearing on the quality of education provided. In rural areas, cultural taboos are causing the early exit of pupils to get married, the failure to understand the value of education, and the engagement of pupils in economic activities in lieu of going to school. A worse culture has emerged in urban centres: holding expensive weddings, funerals, religious occasions and parties when schools are without adequate classroom space, hence have high staff/students ratios and have inadequate desks, and when staffrooms and other important materials and equipment to support effective teaching and learning are absent or lacking.

It must be noted here that many of these wasteful and expensive functions last only a few hours and have no impact at all on the social, economic, political and cultural development of the country. These cultural practices need changing. Maybe the government needs to introduce an education levy for all extravagant functions to instil a sense of priority into community members. A more radical act might involve introducing an education levy at the fuel pump to resolve the problems of children sitting on the floor or lacking textbooks, a strategy that might result in a quick fix of perennial problems.

International conditions. Tanzania is not an island. For many years, the country has benefited from varying financial assistance from partners in education development. Three issues come to the fore at this juncture. The first is, does Tanzania need external loans to finance primary education? The answer is NO. We need to go back to education for self-reliance whereby households keeping only two chickens or planting only one mango tree in their compound could raise the Tshs 10,000/-. We need to remember that we get a lot of conditionalities from donors. The second is, are funds from partners in education development being used effectively to realise high quality education? What is the proof on the ground? The third is, how is the current arrangement enabling Tanzania to realise its long-cherished objective of self-reliance, the foundation of sustainable high quality education? Quality education also requires the availability and effective use of inputs.

Inputs. Key among the inputs is a high quality and experienced system of institutional leadership. Today, many positions, particularly at headquarters, remain without substantive appointees for a long time. Is this caused by the lack of competent candidates or disrespect for Standing Civil Service regulations? Currently, four top positions at the Ministry Headquarters have been held by people in an acting capacity, some for over two years. How can one elicit commitment to quality improvement from un-trusted acting officers? Is it too difficult to institute a system of succession planning?

Similarly, does the system of compulsory retirement from the leadership of education institutions and top bureaucratic positions apply selectively, or is the law being bent, and what impact does it have on succession planning in the civil service and the education sector?

Unsatisfactory levels of financing. Statistics show that Tanzania spends only 2.1 per cent of its GDP on education compared with 6.8 in Kenya, 13.3 in Lesotho, 3.8 in Uganda, 2.8 in Rwanda and 2.2 in Botswana [WB indices, 2010 cited on the internet]. Similarly, allocations within the sub-sector are also lopsided. For instance, out of the budget of Tshs 666 billion for the education sector for 2010/2011, almost Tshs 240 billion (36%) was to be spent by the HESLB on students' loans. This arrangement starves the sector of capital development and other charges to support the provision of high quality education. Studies show that investing in strategic inputs, such as sufficient high quality teachers, relevant textbooks, and improved well-furnished and equipped classrooms, especially in rural areas, as well as in technology when used effectively, tends to make teaching and learning interesting and facilitates learning (Mosha, 2000).

Quality of teachers. Although there are growing numbers of private primary and secondary schools with adequate numbers of well-qualified and regularly-developed teachers, who are also well-remunerated, many public schools currently face an acute shortage of well-qualified teachers, especially in secondary schools with one or two teachers (Mwaipopo, 2010), most of whom have never benefited from any INSET since graduation, are poorly remunerated, their salaries are paid late, and they are living in miserable working conditions. Hence many are unmotivated. There are also complaints that many teachers, particularly the younger generation, are of questionable moral fabric, work in multiple work stations, especially in urban centres, and have deplorable communication ability.

Most teachers in public schools are directly posted from the Ministry Headquarters, and so school heads and DEOs have little power to check on their competence. On the contrary, managers and school heads of private institutions have all applications for teaching posts addressed to them. They are also the ones who organise interview sessions with the applicants and assess their suitability for the vacancies in their schools. These teachers are also given the opportunity to attend seminars to enhance their skills.

Teachers' motivation. Teachers in academies, good denominational schools and international schools, which children of the affluent attend, are offered good salaries, fringe benefits, public recognition, free accommodation, free electricity and free water. As such, many public schools are losing high quality teachers to private schools which

offer better salaries of up to Tshs 1,500,000/= compared with salaries of Tshs 634,500/= for the best paid teachers in community-based secondary schools. *Even at universities, dons' housing entitlements were yet to be settled despite the government's promise of clearing all teachers' debts.*

At institutions of higher learning, following rapid expansion, several junior staff, with very mixed abilities, have recently been engaged as assistant lecturers and tutorial assistants, sometimes teaching foundation courses to very big classes. One questions the levels of knowledge being dispensed in such large classes. Carnoy (2006) observed that recruiting well-trained and professionally-developed teachers ensures that students *master and can manipulate* the subject content with ease. Whether this is, indeed, happening at all levels of education in Tanzania remains questionable. Hence, there is need for holistic teacher education and management that takes on board the quality of the candidates selected for the profession. There should have been a balance between academic and skills during pre-service training, at least two years' probationary period before certification to allow for proper induction and mentoring, opportunities for in-service education, evidence of motivation, effective supervision, quality assurance and quality control as well as a working system of accountability and responsibility. These attributes, when matched by hard work, are likely to improve the quality of education.

The quality of students admitted at the secondary, teacher education and university level is yet another matter of concern. Mosha (2000) had earlier established that a school without a good and careful selection of students for admission was likely to obtain poor results. In private schools, the diagnostic tests given to aspiring students before admission serve this purpose of ensuring that qualified candidates with good potential get admission. Carnoy (2006) has also found that schools and school systems that have many school-ready children can produce high test scores, with less effort, than children with less academic skills acquired at home. Also students' and parents' positive behaviour in relation to academic excellence can lead to students' good academic performance.

Kilasi (2011) discovered that one of the reasons behind the failure to read and write by some students admitted to secondary schools was laxity in the supervision of PSLE in some centres, and the lack of diagnostic tests upon admission. Moreover, most of the candidates selected for teacher education programmes generally had weak passes in CSEE and ACSEE, and yet they were expected to produce high quality results among the pupils they taught upon graduation. What a dream!

Syllabi. There has been uncoordinated tinkering with the syllabi, which rendered many years of intervention having little or no impact on quality improvement. During the

PEDP I (2002-2006), the traditional, content-based curriculum was implemented, using the multi-textbook approach, with heavy internal and external financial investment. In 2005, there was a paradigm shift in the curriculum, from the content-based to the competency or skills-based curriculum, leading to the introduction of new syllabi in 2006. This development was accompanied by changes in the textbooks, from a multi-textbook policy to a two-core textbook policy, coupled with rushed or no orientation of teachers to the new curriculum and little synchronisation of the roles of TIE, NECTA, the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) in MOEVT, the University of Dar es Salaam School of Education (UDSE) and NGOs in facilitating effective implementation of the new curriculum to enhance the quality of the education provided. One should, therefore, not be surprised by the lack of improvement in pass rates even after several years of heavy financial input.

The quality of infrastructure. Government and community efforts to improve the infrastructure at the primary and secondary school level have been commendable. Indeed, the number of classrooms, new schools, teachers' houses and toilets and the like has been on the rise. However, they remain inadequate. We are aspiring to improve sport and games in schools without playgrounds, or have muddy running tracks even at the university level.

Although the quality of the infrastructure in several schools might have significantly improved, many are of doubtful standard, and not durable. Three factors account for this state of affairs: theft, corruption and ethical decadence. We need to stop mincing words. When a *'fundu'* is preparing a concrete mix for 50 blocks per bag instead of 25, definitely there is someone elsewhere stealing the other bags. Similarly, when one is responsible for quality control, but is not taking action, it is because the system is corrupt, and hence the unethical behaviour of stealing is tolerated. This covers other aspects, such as the procurement of materials and equipment for construction. So the cracks seen in the walls and potholes in the floors of recently constructed classrooms are not caused by earthquakes or big lorries driving over the floors. They are the products of theft and corruption. What the nation is also experiencing in schools, some even close to the Ministerial Headquarters—pupils sitting on the floor, using each other's backs to write in their copybooks, and over twice the approved number being lumped in a classroom— are not only acts of inhumanity, but practices that cannot support the realisation of high quality education.

The methods of teaching. Carnoy (2006) had earlier observed that without good teaching methods it is difficult to improve students' academic achievements. Many academies and international schools, as well as a few denominational schools, use child-centred methods—group discussions, independent studies, field visits and excursions as well as debates - to enhance learning. Group discussions ensure students' success,

because they allow learners to build their understanding at higher levels than they could have achieved from activity-based strategies alone (Mckendre, 2003). Students are also able to teach one another and promote team spirit, co-operation, and competition. Using all these participatory teaching methods helps to enhance students' learning. These methods also promote a spirit of competition and the drive to excel.

A word of caution, though; student-based instructional practices, meant to enhance performance, are not feasible in the context of a large class size of say 1:90 at the primary level, or in situations where only a few students are cramped into the few desks available in a classroom while the rest squat on the floor. These methods are also ineffective even at university level with class sizes of over 1,000 students.

Availability of adequate teaching and learning materials and their effective use. As Ward (1994) maintains, one of the factors determining a school's effectiveness is adequate materials such as textbooks, other reading materials, teachers' guides, sufficient writing materials and well-equipped classrooms. As stated elsewhere, due to frequent tinkering with the curriculum, ten years of basic education textbook support has not improved the textbook situation in many public schools. In many private denominational schools, parents are required to buy textbooks for their children. Many public secondary schools lack science facilities, equipment and laboratory technicians, for the institutions that were training them have been put to other uses; hence support inputs and services to facilitate effective science teaching and learning are unavailable. Mosha (2011) has observed that parental commitment to buying learning materials and contributing to the school's progress can lead to close follow-up of students' academic progress as the parents would like to get a good return for their money. One wonders why educated people continue complaining about the declining reading culture, when the answer is obvious. Children in schools do not have access to books to read.

The other issue is who is buying textbooks for pupils in schools and students in an institution. There has been a lot of experimentation that is yet to produce good results. First it was the MoEC, then the councils, followed by private providers and now it is the schools again. Hence there has been an oscillation in the policy from single to multiple and currently to a few selected textbooks per subject. At the university level, it is students' power that determines how textbook money paid to them should be used, sometimes anyway. This is corruption of the worst kind. One can only expect miracles to happen, in striving for high quality education, in the absence of a good supply and effective use of textbooks and other learning materials at all levels.

Effective supervision of the instructional programme, regular monitoring of students' progress, and teachers' feedback. Intra-school and external supervision is important for the successful implementation of interventions meant to realise high quality education. Studies by Kilasi (2011) and Nzigilwa (2010) show that external inspection of schools was rarely done, and where it was done it was not accompanied by follow-up visits to ensure that recommendations are enforced for improvement. The major setbacks identified were the lack of funds and reliable transport. On the whole, a system of external inspection also facilitates the checking of the effective use of resources for capital development and the adequacy of teaching and learning, as well as students' progress. Nzigilwa (2010), Kipolesya (2010) and Kilasi (2011), however, have consistently found that only a few schools had established effective in-school/institutional systems for monitoring quality and providing feedback to teachers on needy students, and holding underperforming schools/teachers accountable. One wonders whether, even at university level, the systems of quality assurance and quality control, if in place, were working effectively. As a matter of fact, students' assessment is useful for providing information that can be used to judge the progress made, and provide timely feedback to the learner, the teacher and educational managers, so that they can take remedial steps to improve performance (Mosha, 2000).

Effective use of time. Time is the most inelastic and scarcest resource; hence its effective and efficient use is central to instructional programme implementation (Mosha, 2006). Myers (1990) had earlier observed that *the amount of time students devote to actively engaging in learning tasks is an important process variable, significantly related to their achievement outcomes*. Visits to schools at the beginning of the academic term, in the mornings and late evenings, reveal several cases of mismanagement of time. Universities are no exception, especially at the beginning of academic terms, and during classroom boycotts, which affect timely completion of graduate studies. Good time management also helps teachers to cover all the content specified in the syllabi and revise the subject areas they thought needed further clarification.

Good school discipline. Good discipline should guide everything in schools and institutions if equity, excellence and perfection are to be realised. Good discipline is only feasible where the system and institutions are willing to listen to and act on the truth. Disciplined systems and institutions are characterised by order, smoothness, and the lack of friction and turmoil. The bottom line is, everyone in the system— managers, administrators, teachers technical, support staff and students—must observe good discipline because disobedience or deviation from ethical standards means going against the established principles of good governance, which leads to abuse of power, and erodes courage for taking measures to ensure full accountability and responsibility

in relation to quality assurance and quality control. It also creates hardships and demoralises teachers and students, thereby reducing quality.

Conclusion

We need to use the facts on the ground, first to admit that the education system in Tanzania today, despite a few successes, is in a state of crisis. Once the bureaucracy at the top admits this, the nation needs a Marshal Plan for the education sector, sooner rather than later, to rescue the country from peril. The Plan should clarify the logical chain of priorities among sectors and within the sector. The process of developing it needs to bank on expertise and comprehensive community participation. As the President of Zanzibar recently declared, Tanzanians need to reach a stage when they stop talking about their problems and take action. The stock-taking about the state of the education, done on the occasion of celebrating 50 years of Tanzania's national independence, would be the best starting point for doing that. By so doing, we shall start the second half of the 'Centennium' well-determined and better-placed to attain equity, excellence and perfection in our education system.

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