



Don't miss a new opportunity for science teachers

TEACHING science subjects has remained one of the uphill tasks for most schools in the country, right from primary to secondary education.

Science subjects are in most cases the most poorly done in Primary Leaving examinations and Uganda Certificate of Education examinations. Last year, in the O'level final exams, the worst performance was registered in science subjects, with 45% of all candidates failing to attain the minimum competence level in these particular subjects.

A number of studies have shown that teachers in most schools in Uganda have not yet devised an effective way of teaching science subjects. Most teachers, knowingly or unknowingly, make the learning of sciences complicated and students get to dislike science subjects.

But we can all change this tide in the teaching of science subjects. This is the reason why *New Vision* has partnered

with Beacon International School, to pilot a simplified and best way of teaching science subjects in primary schools, with the help of international experts.

The school's senior international educationist Ian Miller will be in the country this month, to conduct sessions with selected teachers, for two days; July 18 and 25, on the new ways sciences can be taught in schools.

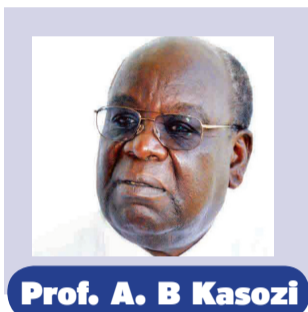
Are you a science teacher or head teacher in a primary school and would want to improve your teaching skills, or do you have any questions you want answered in this regard? If so you, you stand a chance of being selected to be part of this special training for science teachers at Beacon International School. The school and Vision Group will meet the training expenses, and teachers have to meet their transports costs. If you are interested, please write to mwalimu@newvision.co.ug and we will get back to you.

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OPINION

Do not crush students' strikes, listen to them



Prof. A. B. Kasozi

Governments fear student activism because it often pertains to broader political and economic issues in society. Student movements emerge from their own social and political environment.

In underdeveloped and often badly governed countries, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, students often aimed not only at changing the structures of the states but incumbent governments. In most of these countries, alternative sources of power to the executive such as parliament, the mass media, trade unions, non-government organisations and the general civil society are weak, suppressed, compromised or non-existent. There are, therefore, few competing social forces that can stand up to absolute governments, and students often take on this role.

University students, sometimes the army and the police, are often the most organised groups to articulate the problems, and fight for society. Students thus become the voices of their societies. Further, in nations where incumbent governments are afraid of organised opinion and crush any organised crowds, students are one of the social groups that are easy to mobilise and question incumbent, corrupt and intolerant governments.

Although student activism can lead to long-term positive social change, it has a number of short-term negative results on universities. It leads to university closures, harsh measures being introduced in the academy, silencing of brilliant potential leaders amongst students and it delays positive higher education reform because policymakers are afraid of student power.

Closures of universities are the most widespread actions to result from student activism. This does not only delay the completion of academic and practical programmes, but also affects quality as some brilliant staff and students do not return when institutions reopen.

Student riots destroy infrastructure and facilities. Some of the riots aim at academic staff, which often results in brain drain. Several university closures in Africa can be cited as examples.

Because students are a powerful social force

when organised, African governments muzzle them and their universities by requiring students to sign submissive agreements before re-entry, punish them harshly, interfere with their electoral processes and sometimes have them locked up. Many African governments respond by placing security forces (including the army) on campus. In the latter part of the Amin period, a loyal police officer was planted on campus to head the university security force.

The silencing of student leaders by governments is perhaps the most negative outcome of riotous student activism. Student leaders are often brilliant and a number of them emerge as social leaders in their adult life (Hanna and Hanna, 1995). For example, a random review of a few of Makerere's student leaders reveals brilliant potential. Abu Mayanja is reputed to have been one of the most brilliant students to go through King's College Budo; with distinctions in almost all O'level subjects he took (9As). He later served as cabinet minister in more than one Ugandan government as well as the Kabaka's government.

Akiiki-Mujaju (guild president 1964/5) became a renowned academic and political thinker. Tumusiime Mutebile (guild president 1971/72) was the bureaucratic head of the treasury and is now the Governor of the Bank of Uganda. Olara Otunnu (guild president 1972/3) served at the helm of the United Nations agency and is now the Uganda's People's Congress boss. His relative, Otunnu-Ogenga (guild president 1984/5), is a well-known author and professor. Norbert Mao (guild president 1990/91) is a successful politician and was the Chair of Gulu district and is currently the Democratic Party chief.

It is thus in the national interest for governments to accept activism as a normal part of the university experience of a student. Participation in student affairs is part of leadership training. For the majority of students, activism is fun, something they participate in strikes for sheer enjoyment, to be seen to oppose elders, particularly incumbent governments and to assert their independence.

Perhaps the most devastating impact of

students activism is the fear it creates in the minds of national leaders, persuading them to opt for short-term solutions that please students instead of eliminating roadblocks to the delivery of higher education such as spending academic funds on welfare components of education. I am sorry to say that Uganda has failed to face this issue squarely. Nor have students thought seriously about the quality of education they get. Students need to re-focus and support the long-term goal of obtaining quality higher education instead of targeting short-term comforts only.

We must recognise that students contribute to national development, democratic behaviour and good governance through their

representations and activism. They should be fully incorporated in institutional governance.

The 18 to 25-year-olds in our higher education institutions must be given a chance to assert themselves in order to grow; provided they do not interfere with the rights of others or destroy property.



Student power has an impact on financing higher education in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa. In countries where the state used to pay for all components of higher education, students do not want to change the status quo.

The writer is the former executive director of National Council for Higher Education

Caution
The silencing of student leaders by governments is perhaps the most negative outcome of riotous student activism

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