



Editorial

If it's about quality, we urgently need more teachers

This year's country theme for the World Teachers' Day was: *Unite for Quality Education*.

If it is about quality education, much has to be done in terms of recruiting more teachers.

The Education for All Global Monitoring Report by UNESCO has revealed that Uganda needs about 90,000 primary school teachers before the next academic year – 2015.

It adds that by 2020, there will be need for an additional 175,000 teachers.

The Government, too, admits that

there is need for more teachers and the country is operating at the bare minimum of the required teachers.

With increased recognition that teachers are one of the most fundamental resources for improving students' learning, there is growing interest in ensuring that there are enough teachers hired and retained.

Over the years, due to the rapid population growth, there is need for more schools and teachers.

This calls for more investment in the training of teachers. But most importantly, there must be

a deliberate effort to retain the teachers who are being hired annually. Studies show that there is a massive attrition of teachers in the country, partly arising from poor remuneration.

As UNESCO notes, teachers are the core of any education system. Hiring and training new and already established teachers is fundamental in protecting children's ability to learn.

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Uganda's poor reading culture needs urgent attention

In a population of over 30 million people, only 6% access information in the print media

Uganda suffers from a low reading culture. A reading culture is a set of behaviour where reading is not only part of people's way of life, but also constantly used by a good number of people to search for information, the truth, look for intellectual pleasure as well as reading as a hobby.

A poor reading culture, where people neither value nor do any reading, except to look for a few necessary items, is harmful to the development of an individual and nation.

Low levels of reading limit innovative and entrepreneurial minds from accessing cutting-edge information, which they need to realise their ambitions and indirectly, those of the nation they live in. The low levels of reading that many Ugandans suffer from are an indicator of the quality of education our country has, and is giving us.

Yet quality education, which must include both arts/humanities and sciences, precedes development.

In the early 1960s, the countries that are now called Asian giants invested in education, particularly tertiary science and technology, while the petro states, especially those of the Middle East, invested mainly in conspicuous infrastructure and consumption (including huge military expenditures). They did not prioritise education. Today, 50 years later, most petro states are consumed by social inequality, conflicts and oppressive dictatorial regimes.

The Asian giants, on the other hand, without oil or extensive mineral wealth, have joined the clubs of developed high-income and well-governed nations.

Their secret was the polishing of the greatest developmental agents God has given planet earth – human minds.

Through well-funded and, therefore, quality education, the Asian giants



Prof. Abdu Kasozi

created nations of people who could read and access cutting-edge information from all corners of the earth. Knowledge is power, as Plato wrote, and these countries have demonstrated the truth of that observation.

The low reading culture in Uganda is characterised by first, the disinterest of students to read beyond what they need for examinations in order to get the magic papers, the certificates.

Secondly, the inability of most of our "educated" people to read for pleasure before and after graduation is indicative of a low reading culture.

Thirdly, the few libraries we have in Uganda report low levels of visitations and use. A comparison of a bar located in the same geographical area as a library indicated that the drinking place received far more people a month than the reading one.

Most people who visit libraries check out easy to read materials like newspapers and dictionaries.

Another reason for the low reading culture is the low book to student ratio in all levels of our education system. Headmasters, principals and vice-chancellors think of purchasing motorcycles, cars and other big items before they spend on books.



One of the reasons the reading culture remains low in Uganda is because children are not taught to read for leisure in schools

Currently, the Uganda book to student ratio for the primary level is about one book to 13 pupils. At the secondary level, it is about two books for each student, while at the tertiary level (in universities) there are 10 books per student. Most of these are textbooks or religious treatises. In my period as the executive director of the National Council of Higher Education (2002-2012), only one or two institutions had the required ratio of 40 books to one student.

More so, the daily circulation of both the English and native language newspapers does not exceed two million in a population of some 30 million people. It means that only about 6% of the population can directly access written information in the print media. The others get it second hand or through audios like

TV and radio. It should also be noted that a number of reports, including UNESCO, the World Bank and UPE/USE report of 2012, have indicated that our pupils do not learn basic skills in reading and mathematics.

Lastly, listening to discussions by a number of Ugandans on radio and TV talk shows, seminars and conferences, one is embarrassed at how most of those participating are uninformed on basic scientific and social issues.

To cure the problem, we must know the causes, at least the major ones. I feel that some of the causes include the following. First, the increasing enrolment in our education institutions that is unmatched by education facilities at all levels robs educators of the ability to deliver quality education. Secondly,

over-emphasis on centralised examinations by our education system means that our children are conditioned to read only what they need to pass examinations. They do not enjoy the pleasure to search for and appreciate knowledge for its own sake or to use it for other purposes. Indeed, many of the so-called first world schools are called so because they pack students with materials likely to be examined by external examination bodies. Few teach for general knowledge or character formation.

The traditional chalk-and-talk method of instruction, where the teacher or lecturer is the colossus of knowledge and all students bow to him or her, does not create the desire for students to seek knowledge from alternative sources like books.

A secondary school student should read at least one novel, whose content is outside what is taught in class each week.

An undergraduate student should read at least three hundred pages of material that is outside his or her curriculum for general knowledge each week.

It should also be noted that early specialisation into arts/humanities and sciences has become poisonous because it streams and compacts the intellectual conceptions of our children in lockers they cannot get out and which are not reflective of the lives human beings live.

We must rethink our education system if we are to move forward as a nation. We must break the shackles of specialisation into arts or sciences. Each of the disciplines compliments the other to constitute knowledge for life and development.

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