

Chapter 12

Teaching Teachers: The Biggest Educational Challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa

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ABSTRACT

Existing institutionally based systems for educating and training teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa have not kept up with present demand, nor can they hope to meet future needs. The reasons are simple: insufficient numbers of trained teachers and inadequate educational resources. Meeting these needs is not an option; education is the cornerstone for social and economic sustainability. Failure to educate more of a nation's population does not maintain the status quo. In today's world of technology, "uneducated" is synonymous with lower economic and social opportunities. The educational needs cannot be met in Sub-Saharan Africa by building more physical classrooms and dormitories, a reality that is facing emerging and developed countries alike. This chapter discusses the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) and how they can be a partial solution to the needs of developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

Distance learning has swept across the world because it is convenient and it makes learning available that would otherwise not be accessible in traditional classrooms. The need to train untrained teachers and to offer continued professional development dominates the teacher education scene. New communication technologies are offering possibilities that transcend existing institutional and national frameworks. If the twentieth century

planners of teacher education had the capabilities that exist today, it is inconceivable they would have designed the present systems. Instead of blackboards, desks, and stacks of paper, the classes would have been taught using Web, cell phone, social media, iPhones, and Facebook.

The logistics point inexorably to the need for radical reform, but so does all the evidence about quality. Every national system has problems regarding the achievement level attained in schools, particularly in the basic curriculum

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areas of literacy, numeracy, and teacher education. Around the world, teacher training is coming under significant scrutiny due to declines in student performance. Concern about teacher quality exists in most countries. One analysis by Moon (2003) showed that nearly all European countries have legislated or put into place regulations to try to improve teacher education and teacher effectiveness in recent decades. In the United States, President Obama's first Secretary for Education, Arne Duncan, moved rapidly to address the perceived failings of the teacher education institutions. He was quoted in the New York Times as saying:

Many if not most of the nation's 1450 Schools, Colleges and Departments of Education are doing a mediocre job of preparing teachers for the realities of the 21st century classroom. (Duncan, 2010)

Similar concerns have been expressed in other parts of the world. In parts of the South Pacific, nearly 50 percent of the secondary teachers in some countries have no more than a high-school diploma. In other countries, only a small number of students eligible to be admitted can be accommodated due to lack of facilities and faculty. Linked to the concern with education and training are systemic problems around the teaching profession. Shortages of teachers are endemic, particularly in the subject areas of science and mathematics. Attracting teachers to work in challenging contexts, such as poverty, rurality, low pay, and poor social environments is problematic. Always a low-paid profession, now the status of teachers is changing in a similar way. The status of teachers in many countries to be in decline and community confidence in teachers is seen, in some research, to be waning (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Chapter 6 in this text discusses current problems teachers face in today's classroom, either traditional or online.

Although these issues can be identified across the globe, several factors are significantly magnified in low-income countries. Millions of teachers are under qualified or unqualified. Some education

systems depend heavily on volunteer or contract teachers. The recruitment and education and training of teachers lags way behind school systems expanding to meet Education for All Targets and Millennium Development Goals. The problem can be succinctly posed.

Large numbers of teachers are being recruited to keep up with expanding enrolments. But recruitment must grow significantly if the momentum towards universal basic education is to be maintained. Teaching is not a first-choice occupation so that many of those recruited have minimal or no qualifications. The teacher training institutions do not have the capacity to train, through traditional means, all the teachers required, including the unqualified teachers who are already teaching in schools. An acute problem is the shortage of suitable experienced and qualified teacher educators translates into the reality that even where training is provided, the quality can be poor. This applies to pre-service, in-service, and continuing professional-development programs.

Despite the very clear signs of crisis, national policies and institutional responses have been slow. The extensive Multi Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER) led from the University of Sussex summarised in its Executive Summary some of the difficulties:

Teacher education appears to be one of the most conservative parts of many education systems. It seldom is the source of curriculum innovation, theorised pedagogy, or radical reconceptualization of professional learning. It often lags behind schools in the adoption of new practice and patterns of learning and teaching. This is a signifier that political will and bureaucratic courage may be needed for the implementation of real changes designed to improve efficiency and effectiveness. (p. xxv)

Birdsall (2005) suggested that *business as usual* in the teacher education communities of low-income countries is just not an option. The concern about teacher quality goes beyond

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