

## BLAME, SHAME BUT STILL NO GAIN

I am not quite sure why everyone is so surprised by the Form IV results. They only confirm what, really, we all know has been happening for years – that is, a slow decline in the educational standards in this country and particularly in the government schools. Jipu limepasuka! It is now time to be open and honest – as without the truth nothing can be achieved successfully. In this I would refer everyone to the words in 1962 of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere in ‘Tujisahihishe’.

The education system is slipping quietly out of control. BUT, the good news is that it is not difficult to rescue it and to build it to its former glory. Remember, there was a time when the education in this country was very good – when O’levels were worth having and those with the certificate could compete with their counterparts in other parts of the world.

What is beyond debate is that the problem starts in the primary schools. How can secondary education hope to achieve anything when the primary education is so very flawed? Have you ever seen a Swiss cheese? It has lots of holes in it, but there is far more cheese than there are holes. However, when you have more holes than cheese everything crumbles. There are far too many holes now in the primary education system.

The other factor beyond doubt is that teachers are the key – and teachers make the difference. A primary school without teachers cannot be called a primary school, and that applies across the world.

There is much talk about the poor education in this country and lots of ‘wide brush’ suggestions are banded about such as ‘..improve the quality of education’, ‘..overhaul the curriculum and syllabi’, but there is still no real plan. The Hon. Minister Dr Kawambwa says (Mwananchi 19<sup>th</sup> February) “..tuna mipango mbalimbali ya kuhakikisha tunaweza kutatua hili tatizo”. Oh really – so why weren’t there plans to prevent this ‘tatizo’?

You cannot offer solutions unless you are prepared to detail WHO IS DOING WHAT ON MONDAY MORNING and beyond?

So, let’s get to some detail: the big ‘hole’ in primary education is the lack of support and help given to the primary school teachers. They have passed through the country’s system and gained the qualifications to teach that this country requires. After that the whole country blames them! Well, that’s not helpful and, actually, isn’t fair. So what can be done? We have to work with what we have. The greatest feasible or practicable help to teachers which takes account of costs and all logistics is to provide them with books that guide them how to teach, which guide them to improve their knowledge of their subjects and which guide them in the development of their pupils.

The books, and the teachers, should know how children develop. They are not small adults. Children have brains that are developing in terms of mental ability and physical ability. Education in school must take account of that development and work with it and build on it.

Perhaps the biggest issue is skills. Education should provide skills, and then knowledge. Knowledge can be forgotten or, indeed, go out of date, but skills are essential for life and once gained they are not easily lost and can be developed after a child has left school.

The current education system does not give the pupils sufficient skills-training, and that is why the results are so poor.

So – it's not difficult to rescue the education system. Here are my four steps:

1. The country (by a group of educationalists) must decide what it wants an educated Tanzanian to be like on the world stage: What skills and personal qualities should our Tanzanian possess? There are basic skills (reading, writing, speaking, arithmetic etc), there are thinking skills (creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, etc) and personal qualities (responsibility, self-esteem, self-management etc)
2. Once those skills and qualities are decided upon, a curriculum can be developed, STARTING with primary education and building up to higher levels. Knowledge and subjects will then take shape.
3. Books can then be developed which properly incorporate the development of those skills outlined in each syllabus, and which set out proper teaching techniques and methods so that the teachers are fully guided in how to engage the pupils.
4. Alongside this, training of pre-service teachers can be adapted so that the skills-training and development of pupils can be fully understood, with the teaching methods needed for this.

Most of the teachers have been blamed too often, and not supported and they are now in Intensive Care Unit. Everyone is talking but there is no doctor in sight. Someone has to send a doctor if the collapse of education is to be avoided.

My speciality is in the teaching of English as a foreign language and I have developed a course for teaching English in the primary schools which fully supports the teachers, takes full account of child-development and the different learning-styles of pupils, and would bring noticeable results in the teachers' and pupils' abilities within two years. Colleagues of mine have produced books to guide teachers in teaching mathematics to pre-primary, standard I and II pupils, and the content is already bringing excellent results in the primary schools in which we work. I have been working in Tanzanian government primary schools for 19 years.

If you have read to the end of this article then you are someone who is concerned about the education of Tanzania's children, and I ask you, "What are you going to do on Monday morning?"

One thing I would urge you to do is to write with your views.

What I am doing on Monday morning and beyond, is to continue to work to improve the education of the vast majority of children in Tanzania who are in the government primary schools, and who should progress through secondary and beyond to become responsible and useful citizens in this country.

Katy Allen MBE, Director of Village Education Project Kilimanjaro