

THE 6th PAN-AFRICAN READING for ALL CONFERENCE

THEME: Literacy for Community Based Socio-Economic Transformation and Development

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Abstracts and Introduction

Achieving quality education in Tanzanian government primary schools: a multi-pronged approach

Village Education Project Kilimanjaro: Katy Allen MBE (Director), Dilly Mtui (Project Manager), Dr Anne Samson (Education Advisor)

The literacy of the teacher and the resources available are essential determinants of quality primary education in Tanzania. With this in mind, Village Education Project Kilimanjaro (VEPK) embarked on a Whole School Development (WSD) Programme in 2004.

The programme, based on eleven years' experience in rural government primary schools, is long-term, involves a variety of stakeholders and uses native English speakers to address English as a foreign language and in-service development of teachers.

For teachers to be effective, they need to be literate in the language(s) of instruction and in their subject(s). To this extent, written materials should be in the language teachers know and are most comfortable with, be in a culturally acceptable style and motivate and inspire. However, it is not enough to provide materials and expect teachers to know how to use them. Teachers also need training in subject literacy.

In the 'developing world', this support and help is generally provided by international bodies which have limited funding, often for three or five years. VEPK has bucked this trend by taking a long-term view. However, there is still an issue around using English-speaking personnel. Their skills and expertise need to be weighed against language barriers, cultural differences and their expectations of quick results. Getting this balance right is crucial to ensuring any sustained improvements in education quality and levels of literacy.

The papers comprising this colloquium address each of the issues above:

1. A WSD approach to English and subject literacy
2. Literacy and English teaching
3. The impact of foreigners on literacy development

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Achieving quality education in Tanzanian government primary schools: a multi-pronged approach

Village Education Project Kilimanjaro (VEPK), a NGO, has been working in three primary schools to improve the quality of teaching and learning as part of its Whole School Development (WSD) programme. Although the programme is now in the fourth year, it has built on work done in the area over the past eleven years.

The three schools were chosen for their proximity to the NGO base in consultation with the District Education Officer (DEO) who gave permission for the programme to run for an initial seven years recognising that short term projects, which are the current norm in Tanzania, would not have much impact. The schools are typical of Tanzanian schools except that in the Kilimanjaro region, there are more female teachers than males and there does not appear to be a reluctance to send girls to school. The area is also regarded as wealthier than many others in Tanzania. Apart from these few differences, the schools, which are in a rural area, suffer from poor communications and infrastructure, lack of resources, ageing and reducing teacher population due to the increase in secondary schools and many teachers reaching retirement age. It was agreed that for the duration of the project, normal government policies would be adhered to, so for example, if a teacher needs to be moved, the programme adapts.

The first two years of the programme, 2004-2005, were spent researching and identifying the areas which needed addressing. The first year of research comprised a literature search to see what had been done to improve the quality of teaching and learning across Africa, and more particularly in Tanzania. During the second research year, teachers were brought out from the UK to do a baseline assessment and some staff development. The teachers from the UK were used to teaching adults at a basic level of education so it was felt they would be able to access the curriculum at an appropriate level.

During years three and four, the programme has been rolled out using two volunteer facilitators working with the Tanzanian project manager. The programme has been flexible taking into account the needs of the schools, so when examination preparation becomes a major focus in the school year, the programme has tended to reduce its time in the schools. This has meant that change has perhaps been slower than originally envisaged, however, the teachers have been kept on board through the compromising and understanding approach.

Year three highlighted the need for subject knowledge and content to be reinforced. Initially it was thought that developing the teachers' skills would be the way to improve teaching and learning given that the schools had participated in subject seminars over the previous four years and that the teachers were seen as the experts. However, the teachers themselves soon asked for more input on maths, English and science. Thus the importance of the subject language came to the fore. Year four has focused predominantly on the development of maths within the programme with English being addressed alongside. Some of these issues are explored in the paper *A Whole School Development approach to subject literacy* (Samson, 2009)

The programme has made use of the Dini or religious period to take training into the schools. Permission was granted by the DEO for this purpose, as it is a double period when the children are all at church giving the teachers 'free' time. Although there was some resistance by the teachers in the beginning to the use of this time for in-service training, the DEO's permission helped overcome this and teachers now see the sessions as valuable. On occasion they will train each other as teachers teaching Standard VI and VII subjects are clearly more experienced or knowledgeable than those teaching the lower Standards. On other occasions, the 'Dini' sessions will have the volunteer facilitator, supported by the local Teacher Resource Co-ordinator, or project manager address a specific aspect to provide greater clarity, for example, what participatory teaching actually is and on aspects of general school management.

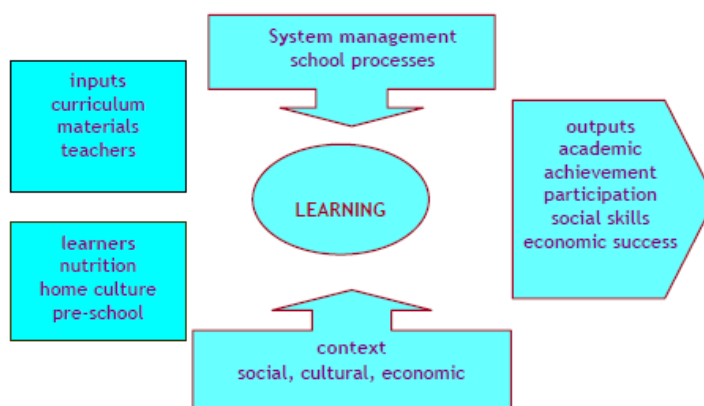
In addition to the general content and methodology input, there is a separate, but linked project focusing on supporting teachers of English in the primary schools. This latter work is based on Katy Allen's experience of teaching English in the primary schools and living in the

community for the past 15 years. This is further explored in her paper on *Literacy and the English Primary Syllabus* (2009).

Alongside the pedagogical input, the WSD programme has arranged training for the head teachers and their deputies as it was known that in most cases in Tanzania, head teachers do not receive any training on how to manage a school. Working with the head teachers on aspects such as team building, action planning and even budgeting (despite the government-imposed constraints) has proved invaluable in improving the school ethos. A senior management team (SMT) consisting of the head teacher and deputies has been implemented in each school and this has enabled a more structured approach to be taken in allocating administrative tasks, planning training sessions and other aspects of school life. Further, providing the school committee with training on its role and responsibilities towards the school has also started to help in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are no longer as despondent about things not being done and worrying about how they can manage them as the School Committee is starting to deal with these aspects, allowing the teachers to focus more on what their jobs are: to teach.

Using the Model for effectiveness proposed by Galabawa and Alphonse (2003, p7), VEPK's WSD programme is focusing directly on Inputs, curriculum, material and teachers through the in-service training, system management and school processes through SMT training externally and in-service, hosting seminars for DEOs and others as identified, such as Ward Education Officers. The learners' nutrition and home-culture is seen as the responsibility of the parents and village and is addressed through the work with the School Committee, although pre-primary is one of the main foci of the wider WSD programme as it is acknowledged that a strong foundation is needed in order for children to succeed. Where appropriate and possible, the local primary Teacher Training College is used for input and translation of materials. In particular tutors from the college have been working on the School Committee training and also on the pre-school support.

Diagram 1: Model for effectiveness



(Lockheed & Verspoor, 1990; Heneveld, 1994)

The underlying principle of the WSD programme is contextualised, which forms part of the paper *The impact of foreign personnel on literacy development* (Mtui, 2009). The social, cultural and economic reality must be taken into account if this is not to be another 'passing ship' as most projects seem to be. The five-year Oxfam EQUIP project in Shinyanga which has now been completed had similar aims to VEPK's, but was done on a much larger scale. How will this be sustained? This question was raised at an Oxfam Workshop in 2008 (p11). And there are many other similar projects.

The need for change is not disputed. The findings of the Shinyanga EQUIP project and the draft *Inset strategy and operational plan* prepared for MOEVT in 2008, amongst others, all support the work VEPK is undertaking in the WSD. The hope is that VEPK will be able to

produce a quality programme making best use of the limited resources available and not reinventing the wheel unnecessarily.

References

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Oxfam (2008) *Community of practice on learner-centred education in Tanzania: Report of the workshop organised by Oxfam GB held at the Tanzania Episcopal Centre (TEC) Kurasin - Dar es Salaam from 18th to 19th August 2008*

A Whole School Development approach to subject literacy

Dr Anne Samson, Education Advisor

Education is regarded as the key of life. Therefore quality education must be the key to a quality life. In order to achieve this quality, it is necessary to ensure that teachers and their pupils have the appropriate skills. The most basic or fundamental one is that of literacy. But there is more to education than just the skill of or acquisition of literacy. For education to be of quality, the possessors of the literacy skill need to know how to use it, including how to adapt it to the different contexts in which they find themselves. To use a cliché, having the literacy skill is the same as giving a man a fish, which feeds him for a day. Teaching him how to use the skill will ensure that he can look after himself for life. Thus, the Whole School Development Programme has taken a holistic approach to in-service teacher development.

Based on VEPK's longstanding relationship with local government schools, it was decided to use action research as a means to engage the teachers and best manage the expectations of English-speaking specialists assisting in the programme. This approach has ensured that cultural sensitivities are taken into account and that teachers take responsibility for improving their own literacy. This paper will provide the context of the Whole School Development Programme and show the importance of engaging the various stakeholders, including government, in improving the literacy levels within the school and thus providing a quality education.

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Literacy and the English primary syllabus

Katy Allen, MBE, Director and Trustee, Village Education Project Kilimanjaro

In Tanzania's government primary schools, particularly in rural areas, the standard of learning English is low. Teachers struggle to understand the language and consequently their ability to teach it well is hampered. The fact that there are numerous textbooks available all in English, does not help.

Many teachers do not have a level of understanding of English to be able to work with the books properly. No account has been taken of their literacy level, nor of their other work and home commitments which leaves, realistically, little time for lesson preparation or, indeed, development of their own use of the language,

Based on a review of how English is taught in other countries and its experience of teaching English in rural primary schools for over eleven years, VEPK believes that for the quality of language teaching and the literacy of teachers to be improved, the current textbooks need to be revamped. This paper looks at the factors which need to be addressed, including:

1. The number of textbooks
2. The lack of practice-exercises, pronunciation guides and repetition/revision of topics/items already learned
3. The language of instructions and teachers' guides

Addressing these three areas will enable teachers to improve their own English skills and therefore those of their pupils. This paper does not enter into the current English/Kiswahili debate but addresses the situation as it presently stands, namely that the medium of Primary education is Kiswahili and that of Secondary is English.

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The impact of foreign personnel on literacy development

Dilly Mtui, VEPK Project Manager

With experience of foreign personnel working in government rural primary schools since 1995, VEPK is well-placed to assess the effect and impact on literacy development. VEPK runs a programme for native English speakers who volunteer for eight months to assist in teaching English to Tanzanian primary school pupils and uses subject specialists in its in-service training with local teachers for English, maths, science and general teaching skills.

The foreign volunteers and specialists bring with them skills and enthusiasm, however, their age, gender, lack of cultural awareness, length of stay and desire to bring about instant change can often cause difficulties. One of these is that of communication. On the one hand, the foreign volunteer/specialist on arrival invariably does not know Kiswahili and depending on their length of stay, might never learn any. On the other, the Tanzanian teachers' level of English is variable with few having a good grasp of the language. This gap needs to be bridged if quality education, and improved literacy, is indeed the end goal. The biggest challenge, however, is getting the foreign helper, despite their skills, experience and knowledge, to understand the importance of language and literacy levels when introducing ideas.

Using the volunteers and subject specialists as a case study, this paper explains how VEPK is trying to manage the impact, both positive and negative, of foreign personnel on literacy development. It is hoped that the strategies developed and lessons learnt will assist other organisations, including government, to make better use of foreigners in their struggle for education.

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