

Putting the spotlight on teacher performance

John Martin

Despite the significant investments made by Eastern and Southern African (ESA) governments, supported by development partners, into improving the performance of teachers, evidence that these investments have been successful is sparse. Indeed, the evidence points in the opposite direction and suggests that there is a crisis in both teaching and learning¹ across ESA countries. Teacher absenteeism is high – a third to a half are absent at any one time² – and teacher quality is low: many do not possess the basic literacy and numeracy skills they are attempting to impart to their pupils,³ let alone possess the pedagogical skills to do so. Neither is there a great deal of unequivocal evidence of what works to improve 'teacher performance'. Clearly the strategies that 'we' (governments, development partners, stakeholders

and 'experts') have collectively been applying have not worked. At worst we have been doing the wrong things; at best we have not been doing the right things.

The author has more than 30 years of experience of working across ESA on more than 50 education programmes, and is as guilty as everyone else in this respect but has hopefully learnt some lessons that will be useful to others.

Building on those experiences, mistakes made and lessons learnt as well as research, grey literature and practitioner accounts, this paper looks at the reasons why we have got this so wrong and makes some suggestions as to what we could change in the future.

¹ The Education Commission Learning Generation Report highlights a learning crisis whereby under current trends by 2030 in low-income countries only one out of 10 young people will be on track to gain basic secondary-level skills. Available from: http://report.educationcommission.org

World Bank Group, Facing Forward: Schooling for Learning in Africa, Regional Study on the Quality of Basic Education, IIEP, Paris, 2 May 2018 https://box.iiep.unesco.org/index.php/s/ZRJXtEZf288sLTZ#pdfviewer

³ Ibid

This Think Piece puts forward three main arguments:

First. By focusing so strongly on teacher development (i.e. teacher training) over the past 20 years, we have collectively allowed ourselves to be distracted from the main goal of improving teacher performance. (We define teacher performance as a set of attitudes and behaviours that result in learning for children. The more that children learn, the better we judge the performance of the teacher to be.) This is not to say that teacher development and training is not important, but that it is only one of a complex set of factors affecting teachers' attitudes and behaviours. Other factors include motivation and morale, incentives and rewards, accountability and responsibility. These should ideally all be linked together in a system for performance management.

Second. Even when working on teacher development, the focus has been mainly on In-service training; Initial Teacher Training (ITT) has been largely neglected. Few, if any, ESA countries have conducted major reforms of their ITT delivery system. There are some ongoing initiatives in Ghana⁴ and Nigeria⁵ but lessons from these are only just beginning to emerge.

Third. Most of the in-service training currently offered is remedial, in that it seeks to deliver the training that should have been delivered during initial teacher training. More worryingly, most in-service training initiatives have failed to gather evidence of their impact and those few that have done so have at best been able to show only small gains. This is despite the large investments that have been made into in-service training in most ESA countries over the past 25 years.

These three statements are examined in more detail in the following sections and suggestions are given for what might change and how such change might happen.

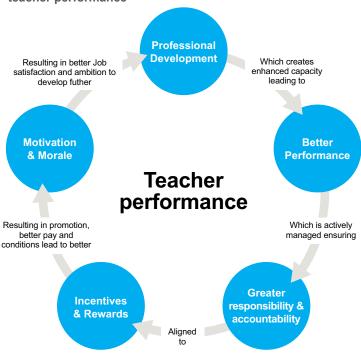
What makes teachers perform better?

There is a tacit and longstanding assumption that if we want better teachers all we need to do is give them more training and/or on-the-job support: the more the better. However, even a few moments reflection on one's own experience should be enough to convince most readers that this is not true. Yes, we might come back from (good) training invigorated and with new ideas, but it is not too long before what we have learnt begins to fade, unless we have other drivers to make us continue to apply such learning. Professional development is necessary both at the beginning of a teacher's career and throughout that career, but it is not sufficient to ensure high (or better) levels of performance. Performance needs to be actively managed. In any job, not just teaching, the other things that drive us to do better are: how motivated we are; whether we feel valued; how high our morale is; what roles we fulfil; whether our performance is aligned to the incentives we receive; and whether we are held to account for our performance.

Figure 1 shows how these factors relate to each other and, when occurring properly, form the basis for a cycle of continual improvement of teacher performance that should be built into a teacher's career path. In the diagram, we can see that professional development should lead to better performance but only if that performance is properly managed. This should ideally be a school based function managed by headteachers or their senior staff. Improving performance should bring with it extra responsibility and accountability, which should be aligned to rewards and incentives available in the teacher's career pathway. This in turn is likely to increase the teacher's motivation both extrinsically (better pay) and intrinsically (a sense of feeling recognised and appreciated). That motivation brings about a wish to do better which leads to a demand for further professional development and more responsibility.

Part of the reason that we have not addressed some of these factors is because they are politically difficult. No government is likely to refuse training for its teachers, but not many are ready to take the difficult decision to reform career paths or tackle issues of accountability.

Figure 1: Cycle of continual improvement of teacher performance



Unfortunately, in many ESA countries this cycle does not exist, or is broken. Teacher development is not effective, performance is not managed, teachers are not held to account. Their promotion, pay, and conditions are not linked to their performance but instead are linked with their age. Neither do they feel valued or respected. Generally, teachers are demotivated. More training will not fix this. The following sections consider each of the elements of this cycle in more detail.

⁴ See www.t-tel.org

⁵ See <u>www.tdpnigeria.org</u>

Teacher Development

We all intuitively believe that a trained teacher is better than an untrained teacher, although the evidence for this is far from conclusive, especially in ESA countries.⁶ More importantly the evidence around what sort of training is the most effective is scarce in these countries. What evidence exists is generally small-scale and linked to specific in-service training initiatives rather than initial teacher training systems. This is despite the fact that most donor funded education programmes spend an estimated average of 40 per cent of their gross investment on in-service training of teachers in one form or another.⁷

Initial Teacher Training

In the case of Initial Teacher Training (ITT), there is little or no systematic research or evidence from ESA countries that shows whether two or three years spent in a Teacher Training Institution has any impact at all.8 On the contrary, the very low levels of learning outcomes in many of these countries point to the fact that these systems are demonstrably failing.9 If we add to this the fact that such systems are very expensive to implement (relative to the overall level of education spending in low-income countries), then there is even more reason to ensure ITT systems are effective. 10 Unfortunately, and despite this, reforms of Initial Teacher Training have been largely missing both by ESA governments and donors alike over the past 25 years.

In practice, most initial teacher training systems in ESA are outdated and disconnected from the realities of the classrooms in which their graduates will find themselves. The following list generalizes and summarizes the characteristics of these systems.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

- Courses are generally content-laden and what pedagogy is included is generally focused on the theory of teaching, with little link to the realities of the classroom. Student teachers are rarely given any practical strategies for contending with classroom conditions common to ESA countries, such as overcrowded classrooms and a lack of teaching and learning materials.
- Worse still, the level of content is often inappropriate to the level at which teachers will teach. Much of the curriculum is taken up with re-teaching content from senior secondary school curricula on the basis that students have not mastered this sufficiently well the first time around. Trying to solve one problem has created a new problem.
- Pedagogy and practice teaching often take up much less than half of the curriculum. At best trainees develop theoretical knowledge but not practical skills.
- Practice teaching is usually in a single block in a single semester. It is poorly supported and monitored, and not linked to pedagogical courses. Innovative approaches to teaching, such as weekly tutoring with small numbers of children or acting as a teaching assistant for a few hours a week at nearby schools, are rare.
- Often the ITT curriculum includes no specific courses on either numeracy or literacy. If they appear at all, these are often combined into content-laden English, local language, or general mathematics courses. A particular effect of this is that many in-service programmes focus on giving teachers very basic skills to teach numeracy and literacy; skills they should already have.
- The curriculum is often set externally, usually by a single university or institution. This dependence on a single academic institution has often created curricula that are 'protected' by an academic elite that itself is out of touch with schools and appropriate pedagogic approaches.
- In some countries, examinations are also set and marked externally every semester (or annually) by a single university. The funds generated and dispersed to institutions, invigilators, and markers involved in this system can create a vested interest to resist change. Exams also tend to focus on content recall rather than demonstrations of pedagogy, thereby reinforcing the need for content-laden courses.
- In some countries there is no differentiation of training to teach at different age ranges. Training is general across both primary and lower secondary.

⁶ Mahendra, S.; Baxter, S. Helpdesk Report: Impact of Teacher Training on Students' Learning Outcomes. Human Development Resource Centre, UK, 2011

⁷ Estimated from expenditure profiles of six large DFID education programmes. UNICEF programmes are likely to be at least this proportion, and USAID programmes are likely to include a much larger proportion.

⁹ Junaid, Muhammad, I., and Maka, Francois, In-Service Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Synthesis Report, p.43, 2015

¹⁰ In the case of Ghana, 6% of the 35% public expenditure on education is spent on ITT. Given Ghana's targets for national enrolment and pupil teacher ratios, an expansion of the current ITT system to produce enough teachers is not financially viable. See Lewin (2004) p.21.

Structure and systems

- The supply of teachers from institutions rarely matches the demand from schools either in quantity or in areas of speciality.
- There is little or no tracking of ITT graduates to see where they go or how they cope. Most teacher training institutions have no idea about the quality of their graduates and therefore miss an important opportunity to improve their training.
- ITT institutions generally have very little autonomy to change things themselves. In many countries staff are centrally posted to colleges, not appointed by colleges and paid from a central payroll.
 Curriculum, course structures, and exams are imposed externally.
- Staff at ITT institutions are generally required to hold a degree or higher degree, but this is often subject-based rather than based on a professional area of expertise (early childhood development, primary etc.). This means that they do not have the necessary knowledge of the relevant pedagogies.
- Experience of teaching in a school may not be needed to become an ITT tutor. Many ITT tutors responsible for conducting courses for prospective primary teachers have no practical experience of teaching in a primary school themselves.
- There is little or no external quality assurance of ITT institutions.
- A large proportion of students never end up teaching, nor had any intention of becoming teachers in the first place. At best this wastes scarce funds; at worst it produces unmotivated and poor teachers.
- The 'worst' qualified often end up teaching at the lowest grade levels. Arguably this should be the other way around as research is overwhelming that investment in education at younger years has most lasting impact.

Value for Money

 Most ITT courses consist of a two- or three-year residential programme. This is a very expensive training model, especially given the lack of evidence for its effectiveness in many countries.

Clearly not all these characteristics apply to every country, but a significant proportion apply to most countries which have collectively resisted change for many years. As such, tinkering with existing ITT systems by merely trying to improve the capacity of tutors through more training would be insufficient (as it is for teachers). In most ESA countries, ITT systems are long overdue for major systemic reform. To inform such reform more research, experimentation and investment in the area of ITT is required.

One option to 'fix' such systems is to take them as they are and fix their component parts; reforming curricula, training tutors to better deliver training, increasing the time students spend in real classrooms, giving institutions more autonomy and helping them to mature into self-improving tertiary institutions, increasing the levels of quality assurance and accountability etc. This type of reform is currently being attempted in Ghana and Nigeria but it is too early to judge how successful these will be.

An alternative would be to consider other innovative and more cost-effective systems for initial teacher training such as school-led training.11 Such systems now exist in countries like the United Kingdom alongside more traditional routes. In such systems, schools (or districts) recruit their own teachers and are then responsible for their initial teacher training. They do both on-the-job training using trained mentors, and short releases to teacher training institutions – instead of the other way around. The advantage is that schools have more control over the quality of the teachers they recruit and can therefore be made much more accountable. Such systems are likely to be much more cost effective with less attrition. However, it should be stressed that such innovations will not work any better than existing systems without: 1) investment to create a strong cadre of mentors from existing teachers; 2) ensuring that existing ITT institutions are properly prepared to re-task themselves; and 3) creating strong management and leadership within the new system.

In some countries these two approaches have converged towards one another. In the UK for instance, training institutions have developed strong relationships with schools, students spend a large proportion of their time in these schools and teacher training institutions train and pay school mentors. Some schools in the UK have been allowed to train their own teachers and buy services and training from ITT institutions as required. This sort of innovation has not been tried in ESA and whilst reform of institutions of a radical kind always faces strong resistance, the potential for strengthening the quality and increasing the efficiency of ITT might be a game changer. Whilst it will require strong political vision, the appetite for change might be whetted with a few small-scale pilots.

In general, current ITT in ESA countries is not working well, making it an area ripe for research, innovation, and focused experimentation from countries and donors alike.¹²

¹¹ In 1997, Malawi drastically reduced the time and cost of ITT through its MIITEP programme in order to rapidly certify 18,000 unqualified teachers. It provided a flexible ITT model that used short college-based courses linked to school-based training. Although progressive in aims, it suffered many tensions in the didactic way in which it was implemented. See Stuart, J, S, and Kunje, D, The Malawi Integrated In-Service Teacher Education Project: an analysis of the curriculum and its delivery in the colleges MUSTER Discussion Paper No 11, Centre for International Education, University of Sussex, 2000.

Emerging examples of ITT reform can be seen in West Africa in Nigeria and Ghana. But lessons learned are just beginning to be produced. See more at: www.t-tel.org

In-service Teacher Training

In-service Teacher Training abounds in ESA and, whilst it is not within the scope of this Think Piece to examine the effectiveness of all the many models that exist, there are three broad points that can be made:

First. Almost all in-service training in ESA is essentially remedial in that it seeks to give teachers training that they should already have been given during their ITT experience. Such training does not really fit in the category of Continuous Professional Development (CPD)13. While remediation is not necessarily a bad thing because weak ITT systems mean that many qualified teachers still need remedial training, there should be a shift in the balance of investment towards ITT systems reform.

Second. While some in-service training is paid for and delivered by ESA governments themselves, a larger proportion is paid for, managed, and delivered by development partners.14 Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing as it does give a necessary boost to teachers' skills. However, this rarely leads to a sustainable system of in-service training. To create that would take much greater ongoing investment from governments themselves. which would have to be weighed against other pressing priorities both within and without the education sector. The real question, then, is whether or not it is better to spend available funds on improving ITT.

Third. The reason that most in-service training is not sustainable is because the levels of investment and external inputs cannot realistically be matched by governments in ESA. However, the emergence of low-cost, or no-cost, school-based in-service training models show much more promise in this respect. 15 Such models probably do not have as great an impact in the short-term compared to expensive, well designed and delivered, one-off training courses. But the fact that they are potentially sustainable at the local level means that they have the potential for a greater long-term impact.

A possible solution to this and the ITT issues discussed above would be to create an integrated teacher training system that combines both ITT and CPD. To be affordable, this would be based on much greater in-school training combined with outreach programmes from teacher training institutions. This would, however, require re-tasking those institutions. Such significant reforms would be best piloted on a small scale both as proof of concept and as a chance to shift ingrained attitudes.

Accountability and Responsibility

Better teacher training, unfortunately, is not guaranteed to ensure better performance in the classroom. For this to happen teachers must also be accountable, and if they wish to progress up the school management structure they must be expected to take on more responsibility. This means that their performance must be actively managed in some way. This might be through formal appraisal approaches, or through regular monitoring by head teachers, other senior staff, or district level inspectors, or a combination of all of these.

Devising such a performance management system is not difficult, but the issue then arises as to how this is linked to the teacher's progression along their career path. This in turn is dependent on who makes the decisions about promotion. In many ESA countries, this is decided by a committee or district officials who have never seen the teacher perform and therefore rely on an interview or inconsequential paperwork. In an ideal world, the person or persons who are best able to regularly monitor the teacher's performance should be contributing to such decisions. The main decision maker should be the headteacher. However, to avoid favouritism or nepotism, and to increase the validity and reliability of the headteacher's evaluation, others such as senior teachers, inspectors, and/or other education professionals that regularly visit the school should also contribute their views. Decisions should then be ratified by School Management Committees and at the district level.

There is also the question of what a teacher is being promoted to do. In many ESA countries, grades are not linked to responsibilities as might be expected. Teachers are promoted to a higher grade and title, not to a more responsible role. Promotion is more often based on getting older (years of experience) than performance.

For example, in Ghana a teacher can reach the grade of Principal Teacher after a minimum of 11 years of service, and the descriptor for this grade is:

Can serve as head of basic school and/or a resource person, coach other teachers and implement strategies that lead to improving classroom teaching and learning. Able to interpret and implement educational policies. Ability to mobilize resources, to have negotiation skills.16

¹³ CPD seeks to refresh and expand the skills of practising teachers throughout their careers. This assumes they have a set of basic pedagogical skills to begin with.

¹⁴ Junaid, Muhammad, I., and Maka, Francois, In-Service Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Synthesis Report, p.81, 2015.

¹⁵ Such as JICA's peer-to-peer school-based professional development. See Hung et al., Lesson Study. Scaling up peer-to peer learning for teachers in Zambia, Center for Universal Education at Brookings, 2015.

¹⁶ Ministry of Education, Republic of Ghana

Apart from the fact that this definition includes a mix of competencies and grade descriptors, it is not clear what new role that the teacher will play: it provides some vague guidance as to roles the teacher might play, but no certainty. In practice, a promoted teacher will only take on extra duties in a school if they are not already being done by someone else, and might take on no extra duties at all. Many other ESA countries have systems that are comparable to this. We should be moving towards a system where the expectation is that promotion is strongly and transparently based upon performance, and carries with it very clearly defined extra duties. It is worth noting that in some OECD countries, grades are linked to roles in such a way that promotions can only happen when there are vacant roles to be filled either within the teacher's own school or within other schools by application and selection. In most ESA countries they are not.

Incentives and rewards

A career structure which properly bases career progression on performance, and then provides adequate incentives to advance up this career structure, is far more likely to result in all-round better performance by teachers. This is not so much about absolute levels of pay and conditions, but about whether at each stage of advancement the incentives are sufficient for teachers to want promotion, and are willing to take on the burden of extra responsibilities. This is often not the case. In Uganda, for instance, a headteacher at the top of the pay scale earns approximately 1.95 times that of a newly qualified teacher. In the UK, this multiplier is approximately 4.8. It is a reasonable hypothesis that teachers will want promotion, be more willing to take on extra responsibility and accept less pay early in their careers if the rewards grow greater the further they progress. This is especially true when they have increasing personal responsibilities such as growing families. Such an incentive will only work however if performance and promotion are closely linked. (It should be noted that this hypothesis is largely untested but could prove a fruitful area for research.)

Clearly 'fixing' this is not difficult from a technical point of view. It would be relatively easy to create a new career structure and performance management system that links pay and promotion to performance. The difficult aspect is to persuade politicians and high-level decision makers to embark on such a politically sensitive course of action when they know they will face intense opposition to change from those with vested interests in the current system. Teachers' unions are often perceived to be the most likely opponents to such change (although this perception has not really been tested). If a career structure based upon a performance framework could be shown to be advantageous to most teachers then why would they object? A good strategy for government might be to enter into such discussions during the regular pay review/ negotiation process and be prepared to offer a one off exceptional increase in salaries to achieve what would be permanent structural changes.

This requires sufficient political will at the highest level of government, detailed forward planning, and a strategy to persuade key stakeholders of the benefits to all. The donor community's role is to influence and persuade government, possibly offering incentives or funding to kick start change. They can also help to work out the technical detail of such change. UNICEF or other donors might help broker such discussions.



Motivation and Morale

A teacher's state of mind is also important, and motivation can come in several forms. It can be driven by extrinsic incentives as described in the previous section, or it can be intrinsic in the form of job satisfaction, and feeling valued, appreciated, and respected. Both are important. While a system should focus on positive reinforcement of good performance, there needs to be consequences if a teacher deliberately does not do their job and sometimes if they are unable do their job.

A real and recent example related to the author by a headteacher in an East African country was of a teacher who was repeatedly absent or turned up to work drunk. The headteacher spoke to them numerous times and then eventually started to issue written warnings. After three warnings, the School Management Committee took up the case and spoke the teacher several times. Eventually it was escalated to the District level, who then called them in several times for further discussions and warnings. This process took at least six months and the outcome was that the teacher was eventually posted to another school: the reason given was that they might do better under someone else's guidance. The result was that they became someone else's problem and different children are now suffering from his indiscipline.

The reader can make their own judgement about the above example, but the processes involved are typical in many ESA countries. While this is an extreme example of what should have been a disciplinary matter (with immediate suspension), there are many other more subtle instances where teachers are not doing their job well, and headteachers and schools are powerless to deal with these decisively and quickly. Underperforming teachers should be offered support and encouragement in the first instance but if they do not react positively to this then there must be options to discipline or remove such teachers. While this may seem harsh, our priority should be safeguarding the rights of children first.

Increasing levels of intrinsic motivation ('I want to do my job well because it matters to me') is easy to do with some teachers but harder for others, especially if teaching was not their first choice of career. However, this option is less politically contentious. Many programmes now create 'soft' strategies to try to build this intrinsic motivation. Because such initiatives do not require major systemic change or large amounts of funding they are not resisted politically. STIR Education¹⁷ for instance is implementing such an initiative in Uganda, where the government has asked them to scale to national level.

Extrinsic motivation, however, relates back to the previous section – aligning performance with incentives, accountability and responsibility. Creating a career structure that does this is not a difficult task in principle, but persuading governments and unions that this is necessary is politically contentious. This requires a major system change that few if any governments in ESA have attempted, and which most donors have actively avoided. Nevertheless, these are issues that need to be tackled if we really want to drive teacher performance. Perhaps such issues might be addressed by the Education Workforce Initiative Advisory Group, 18 recently formed under the auspices of the Global Partnership for Education.

Conclusion

This Think Piece has set out three basic arguments about teacher development:

- It is only one of several factors affecting the broader notion of teacher performance. Other factors including motivation, alignment of incentives with performance, accountability, and responsibility should also be addressed if true progress is to be made.
- Thus far, the focus has been mainly on in-service training and Initial Teacher Training (ITT) has been largely overlooked and neglected. The time has come to switch the focus to the reform of ITT.
- We have attempted to remediate ineffective initial teacher training with in-service training that seeks to give teachers the sort of training that should have been given during ITT. While this has been a necessary short-term measure, the aim now should be to create affordable and sustainable systems for genuine continuous professional development - probably school-based, and preferably linked much more closely to ITT systems.

The overarching conclusion is that the performance of teachers - as measured through improved learning of children - will only significantly improve if all aspects affecting that performance are addressed.



¹⁷ See: https://stireducation.org

¹⁸ See: http://educationcommission.org/education-workforce-initiative



Further reading

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List of Acronyms

CPD Continuous Professional

Development

ESA Eastern and Southern Africa

ITT Initial Teacher TrainingOECD Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development



2018 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

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Contact: UNICEF ESARO, Basic Education and Gender Equality Section, UNON Gigiri, Nairobi, Kenya. This research in its latest edition, as well as all materials, are available online for free download at https://www.unicef.org/esaro/EducationThinkPieces 4 TeacherPerformance.pdf

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