



EMILLY COMFORT MARACTHO > VOICE OF MY HEART

Proposed degree qualification for teachers is necessary

The proposal to transform the teaching profession through a drastic increment in the requirements for teaching from a certificate as the current minimum standard to a bachelor's degree has raised eyebrows.

This proposal will also see teachers at all levels get higher but uniform salaries regardless of teaching level.

Some experts see this as a good move, with few reservations, while others see it as a problem. Some say degrees are overrated and not likely to lead to the desired results.

While I have not read the national teacher policy or the 2013 research that informed it, there are good reasons to back this policy and give it a chance, with some amendments.

I hope although the policy has been approved by Cabinet, the Education ministry can still take note of ongoing discussions to ensure that it is better implemented.

Like the science promotion policy, this too has the potential to disenfranchise large sections of teachers without degrees, if not handled well, estimated at 90 per cent, with serious consequences.

I think this is a great proposal because teachers have huge impact on children. At the foundational level, children should be taught by well-qualified and competent teachers. This is not about degrees but competence is a critical success factor. If someone studied Education

and specialised in primary education, I would rest knowing they have interest and can deliver.

Teaching is no joking subject and is demanding in its own ways. My assumption is that for many descent training institutions, someone who completes a three-year degree in Education would have the competence and confidence to handle that level well.

The teacher training institutions were built around pedagogy and that is why some of the greatest teachers I know started from the lowest level and kept upgrading.

If you are a teacher and cannot upgrade in this day and age of information avalanche and technology, you may wish to try elsewhere.

Secondly, teachers are the first models for students. What the teacher knows and how they deliver it is important, as well as how they presents themselves to the learners. In some rural areas, you look at the teachers and feel sorry for the learners.

The third reason is that finally, an attempt is being made to correct the distortions created by Universal Primary Education and subsequently secondary education policies in student-teacher ratios and the resultant quality of students.

Many of the justifications being given for this policy, such as the loss of professional glory and teaching as a last resort were aggravated by them. Clearly, there is nothing wrong with

“

Competence is key. I think this is a great proposal because teachers have huge impact on children. At the foundational level, children should be taught by well qualified and competent teachers. This is not about degrees but competence is a critical success factor.

being a graduate in the teaching profession at lower levels, even for pre-primary. In fact, there is a lot to gain from it.

I do not see these proposals as a reaction to the 'degree disease' that has seemingly befallen us. But as many have pointed out, the ministry needs to look beyond the qualification and examine the education policy as a unit.

I have been labouring to explain to my friends in the media industry that even though there may be gaps in journalism training as they often claim, it does not matter how well we train and produce the best journalism graduates if the industry issues are unresolved, and trained or gifted journalists keep away.

The Press and Journalist Act 1995 attempted

to cure the problem of unprofessionalism in journalism and the media by making a degree requirement key. Two decades later, no one seems to remember that provision, which has fallen flat in its face.

This policy has many odds stuck against it in terms of the current number of teachers without degrees and the cost of obtaining degrees unless government plans to send teachers to acquire degrees for free.

At more than 90 per cent, it is unrealistic to try and achieve this in two years. It is good to be ambitious, but this one needs some praying over for a miracle. It too may fall in the trap of lamentation that 'this was a good policy that failed at implementation'.

I veered into teaching reluctantly. I was persuaded that I could teach, to my dismay. But I am forever indebted to the two wonderful people who convinced me to join Makerere University teaching team 15 years ago. Teaching has become an annoying 'comfort zone', such that the proverbial allure of better pay comes tumbling when I think of not teaching and mentoring young men and women, watching them grow into responsible adults. It is hard work, but joyful.

I believe students will go to university to study Education if we make teaching viable, interesting and rewarding. Government can increase sponsorship for Education.

We can also systematically address the problems that have remained on the teacher's 'manifesto' almost permanently, even if it means handling one issue at a time.

Dr Maractho is the head and senior lecturer, Department of Journalism and Media studies at UCU. emillycm@gmail.com