

Educationists weigh in on the national teacher policy

- April 16, 2019
- Written by Yudaya Nangonzi



Ministry of Education permanent secretary Alex Kakooza

On April 1, Cabinet passed the long-awaited National Teacher Policy (NTP) to, among others, streamline management of pre and in-service teachers in public and private schools for better productivity, discipline, retention and motivation. While educationists back government on this development, they share divergent views on the key policy priorities, writes YUDAYA NANGONZI.

In the policy's foreword, Education minister Janet Museveni says: "Education is a basic human right. The provision of quality education is a firm foundation for achieving the middle-income status..."

Museveni adds that quality education largely depends on the quality of teachers but this remains a challenge. To bridge this gap, first among the policy priorities is establishment of the National Teachers Council (NTC) by an Act of Parliament to professionalize the teaching profession.

The ministry's permanent secretary, Alex Kakooza, says the council will be responsible for registration, licensing and accreditation of teachers and implementation of the motivation framework and the reviewed scheme of service. He likened the NTC to the Uganda Law Council, the overall regulatory body of the legal profession.

"Lawyers pride in having the law council that ensures that their profession is not invaded by masqueraders. We shall have a similar thing for our teachers," Kakooza says.

"This alone will not only protect teachers and give them a different status but also promote their interests because we shall ensure they are ethical and properly trained."

Other priorities are; establishment of the Uganda National Institute of Teacher Education (UNITE), development of teaching standards and mainstreaming cross-cutting issues into teacher training.

A committee has been set up to draft a road map for implementing this policy which requires Shs 20bn over the next five years. The policy targets all teachers in early childhood development centres, primary, secondary, business, technical and vocational institutions and other tertiary institutions. Educationists interviewed by The Observer said formulation of a teachers council caught their attention most.

The municipal inspector of schools in Bugiri, Proscovia Biryeri, wonders whether the council will not duplicate roles of existing government institutions. "Currently, we are under public service and education service commission that have been at the forefront to implement similar objectives as those of the NTC. Now, what will become of them after the council is in place?" Biryeri asks.

She adds that the council needs to be more teacher-oriented for one to appreciate its usefulness in the policy. At present, she says a lot is expected from a teacher by government and parents in terms of output, but less attention is given to him/her in scenarios where there are no textbooks, reading materials and poor teacher-to-learner ratios, among others.

In Bugiri, authorities are grappling with increasing enrolment of learners amid few teachers due to unfavorable staff ceilings. This situation has forced most qualified teachers to opt for private schools since they have no entry into government schools.

"These teachers are overwhelmed and cannot do much. If this council serves interests of a classroom teacher, it will motivate them to work. But, if it looks at working like these existing bodies, we would rather leave things as they are to date," Biryeri says.

The chairman of private schools in Kampala, Hasadu Kirabira, is concerned about the composition of council members.

“We have seen many good policies at the ministry gathering dust on shelves. This council will not be of any use if it mainly involves technocrats who mainly look forward to signing sitting allowances instead of serving interests of classroom teachers,” Kirabira says.

He argues that the council should comprise more teachers who better understand their plight at school level. According to the policy, problems of teacher absenteeism, ineffective teaching, qualifications and standards, institutional leadership, ethical behavior, teacher regulation and professional development persist in the teaching profession.

WILL THE COUNCIL BITE?

As stipulated in the policy plan, the council will act as an agent authorized to accredit teacher education and advise government on matters related to the teacher policy. Council members will collaborate with school managers and teachers’ unions to improve their work environment and evaluate performance of schools and teachers.

This council will also be tasked with presenting exemplary teachers by subject, department, school, sub-county, county, district, region and at national level for recognition.

“On ethical issues, the council will take disciplinary action on all teachers both in public and private institutions in collaboration with the Education Service Commission and District Service Commission,” reads the plan.

The former director for Basic and Secondary Education at the ministry, Dr Yusuf Nsubuga, says the council should, to a greater extent, work towards upholding professional ethics so that teachers can set the bar high for others in terms of discipline.

Now into private service, Nsubuga insists that teaching is a noble profession but some teachers have let them down while current organs in the ministry have not done the needful to protect the profession.

“You hear teachers defile learners and they go away with it. Of course, it is not all about having many institutions but the council should be empowered to have the capacity to bite. If we are just going to have another body like the ones in place, the council will be a waste of time and money,” Nsubuga says.

For instance, he adds that if a teacher is found guilty after a fair hearing, “we should not expect court orders to stop the process. We need a council that has real teeth to bite those who don’t respect our profession.” Nsubuga also urged the council to attract more “young and brilliant” people into the profession as it appears to be for “mediocres” lately.

TEACHERS FOR TRAINING

According to Dr Jane Egau, the commissioner Teacher, Instructor Education and Training, government will set up a National Institute for Teacher Education (NITE) that will work with the

council to implement the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework for all teachers.

The CPD will be compulsory and teachers will be requested to re-register after every one or two years as will be determined by the NITE. This means teachers will be constantly equipped with knowledge and up-to-date innovations.

“Immediately, we shall start on development of standards for the teaching profession in a bid to improve the quality of teachers. Today, we are training most teachers without demonstration schools, which implies that they are not up to the standard that we are looking at when this policy is being implemented,” Egau said.

The policy compels each training institution to have a demonstration school so that teachers have more time for practice before they are released to service. At the moment, one can sponsor their CPD but Egau hopes NITE, which will operate as a semi-autonomous body, will mobilise for funds or scholarships and specific trainings to support teachers.

In doing this, it remains Kirabira’s prayer that the ministry considers all teachers in private institutions. “CPDs are very crucial but our teachers have not been benefiting yet all teacher training institutions are managed by government. If you want to improve productivity, you ought to consider all stakeholders.”

nangonzi@observer.ug