

Teacher training in Rwanda and the shift to English-medium education

John Simpson and Emmanuel Muvunyi

Introduction

Teachers are the most important educational resource, as quality education cannot happen without them. As key agents in helping realise Rwanda's 2020 Vision of a knowledge-based economy, teachers at all levels play a crucial role in the development of the skilled human capital necessary to transform Rwanda from being largely agrarian to a middle-income country and regional leader in information and communication technology (ICT). The Education Sector Strategic Plan 2010–2015 aims at improving education, particularly skills development to meet labour market demand, by increasing the coverage and quality of nine-year basic education and strengthening post-basic education.

Given that the government places a high premium on the development of human capital with the necessary knowledge and skills as a vehicle for socio-economic development – and in line with the Constitution, which stipulates that Kinyarwanda, French and English are official languages – it has developed a trilingual education policy so as to gain regional and international advantages associated with trade, foreign relations, employment and education. The three languages are complementary and interrelated: Kinyarwanda is the bedrock of initial literacy and learning, English is the new medium of instruction and French is the language of wider communication.

With Rwanda's membership of the East African Community (EAC), accession to the Commonwealth of Nations and new international partnerships, the use of English has become more prominent and the need for literacy in English greater. Additionally, the Government has made science, technology and ICT priority areas in education and views English as the gateway to the global knowledge economy. The sector-wide shift to English-medium education is thus a bold and ambitious plan to help meet the goals of harmonising education curricula with other EAC member states and promoting science, technology and ICT in education so as to further stimulate economic development and support poverty reduction.

The Teacher Service Commission

The Education Sector Strategic Plan 2010–2015 is a key document for the work of the Teacher Service Commission (TSC), set up as a Task Force in March 2006. While this status limits TSC's effectiveness, the now operational Rwandan Education Board (REB), together with an appropriate staffing complement for TSC, provides it with a permanent structure and ensures its capacity to implement planned activities.

TSC is made up of four units:

1. Teacher Development and Training
2. School Management and Leadership
3. Teacher Management and Placement
4. Teacher Socio-economic Welfare and Development.

It strives to be open, transparent, consistent, innovative, client-oriented and partner friendly and to use state-of-the-art ICT in service delivery. The goals of the TSC are:

- To ensure provision of sufficient numbers of teachers for basic education.
- To enhance the development of educational professionals.
- To promote effective teacher management.
- To increase the status and professionalisation of the teacher workforce
- To formulate policies in line with the development of the teaching profession.

A Teacher Development and Management Policy (TDMP) has been designed to strengthen institutional and structural capacities for improving teacher quality in primary and secondary schools. This objective will only be realised with the recognition of teaching as a distinct and valued profession within the public service, governed by its own code of professional ethics and having clear pathways for professional development.

Four further plans derived from the TDMP are:

1. A strategic plan that details the strategies critical to its realisation and to strengthening educational management in primary and secondary schools.
2. A continuous professional development plan to be rolled out to all teachers, thereby promoting a sense of individual responsibility for professional development.
3. A comprehensive resource plan – including goods, equipment and infrastructure – to support the TDMP.
4. A monitoring and evaluation framework for teacher development and management.

TSC is also advancing a range of reforms and initiatives in teacher education, management and professionalisation (see Table 1).

Table 1

Reforms and initiatives in teacher education, management and professionalisation

<i>Theme and policy areas</i>	<i>Proposed actions</i>
Teacher recruitment and retention – addressing teacher shortages and attrition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment of high-calibre individuals to teaching Bonding teacher graduates (TTCs, CoE and KIE) to improve retention Strengthening material incentives for teachers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Attracting the brightest graduates into teaching; advertising campaigns that put across a positive, socially rewarding image of the profession. Exploring additional pathways for entry into the profession for non-teaching graduates in areas such as maths, science, economics etc. Planning for high quality, open and distance learning programmes for teacher education, integrated with more conventional pre-service. Establishing a bonding scheme, linked to the student loan scheme, for KIE, CoE and TTC graduates. Introducing new/scaling up existing socio-economic and financial facilities for teacher welfare, such as Umwalimu SACCO (teachers' saving and credit co-operative), Girinka (one-cow-per-poor-family programme), social security, laptop, awards, etc.
Quality improvement of teacher education – ensuring TTIs are producing high-quality teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refocus on TTIs core mission Emphasise in-school training and practical teaching skills Short-term use of teacher educators from the region Development of a structured, systematic in-service teacher training strategy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Re-thinking the core mission of TTIs around preparing trainees for the teaching profession. Strengthening trainees' instructional effectiveness by (a) having a strong focus on key pedagogic skills; (b) introducing internship at end of teacher training at all levels; (c) emphasising school-based training. Recruiting high-level pre-service teacher educators from the region who can both tutor (teach students) and mentor current tutors. Developing a robust strategy for improving the level of subject knowledge and classroom skills of existing teachers that includes a plan to upgrade the qualification of teachers with A2 to A1 level.
Institutional capacity-building – to improve quality of teacher education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible rationalisation/ reform of current TTI structures and capacities (physical, material and human resource) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the capacity of KIE, CoEs and TTCs so as to facilitate increased enrolment. Making better use of Rukara CoE, including a possible merger of Kavumu CoE into Rukara CoE. Upgrading of 2–3 TTCs to offer the Diploma in Education. Improving TTI infrastructure, including classrooms, library, laboratory and ICT facilities; and strengthening/expansion of teacher resource centres. Addressing management capacity issues at TTCs.
Teacher management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting up a TDM database for policy and planning purposes Frameworks for teacher registration and licensing Code of conduct for teachers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing an electronic national teacher registration system to support teacher policy and management, including placement, transfers, remuneration, social security, etc. Establishing a national teacher licensing system. Establishing a teacher code of conduct, including a statement of ethical goals that supports the provision of quality education.
Professionalisation of teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harmonising teacher education curricula and certification Setting minimum professional standards that help create a framework of competencies for teachers Mapping out career pathways in teaching Moving towards a single/ monolithic teacher qualifications framework 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing and harmonising teacher education curriculum and nature of certificate offered at all levels. Defining a set of minimum teacher standards and teaching competencies and producing a statement of pedagogical goals that support the provision of quality education. Introducing new and refining existing INSET qualifications that signal career pathways for teachers. Creating a teacher professional pathway with the long-term goal of establishing teaching as a graduate profession.

Key: TTC = teacher training college; CoE = college of education; KIE = Kigali Institute of Education; TTI = teacher training institute; TDM = teacher development and management

Recent successful achievements in teacher management include:

- Disseminating guidelines to districts on what to include in teachers' files.
- Monitoring the updating of teacher files in districts.
- Preparing and distributing letters of appointment to all teachers who lacked them.
- Collecting data on teacher numbers and using it to determine the number of new teachers needed; approving district teacher placement.
- Preparing and gaining approval of a budget for teacher salaries.
- Undertaking a thorough investigation of teachers' salary arrears with the Ministry of Education and districts.
- Agreeing on and instituting a protocol for processing teachers' salary payments.
- Holding preliminary meetings to deal with the problem faced by teachers whose contributions to the social security fund have not been reported.

It is planned to put a number of statutes and regulations in place to standardise and harmonise key aspects of the profession. These include a national teacher registration system, national licensing system, terms and conditions of service, code of conduct, professional standards and teacher appraisal and evaluation.

In terms of teacher recruitment, 3,300 non-education graduates have been recruited at district level for secondary schools and 70 Peace Corps volunteers have been recruited and deployed. Teachers have been motivated through the holding of a Science Fair Day for teachers at district and national levels, the awarding of prizes to teachers on International Teachers' Day and giving a cow to 150 teachers (and identifying a further 300 teachers to receive cows).

Teacher training

Pre-service training provides trainees with an initial education in relevant subject areas and teaching methodology; it serves as the foundation for professional practice and development. It currently takes place in three sets of institutions: teacher training colleges, training to A2 (Certificate Level) for primary school teaching; colleges of education, training to A1 (Diploma Level) for lower secondary teaching; and Kigali Institute of Education, which trains to A0 (Degree Level) for upper secondary teaching. TSC liaises with all of these institutions to ensure quality training of the nation's teachers.

In addition, in-service training (INSET) offers teachers opportunities for continuous professional development. The main INSET programmes at present provide English language training for all primary and secondary school teachers, maths and science training for secondary school teachers of these subjects, and school management training for head teachers. TSC works closely with district education officers to facilitate decentralised ownership and delivery of INSET. Some achievements include holding English language training for around 45,000 teachers, training 250 English teachers as school-based mentors, and training 4,500 teachers in maths and science content and methodology

Partners

The TSC has developed partnerships with a number of organisations. For example, the British Council has been a key partner in the Rwanda English in Action Programme (REAP) – discussed below – by providing technical assistance and resources such as classroom language training materials, radio and online programmes for teaching and learning English, teaching English training videos and a Certificate in Secondary English Language Teaching. The Council also co-ordinates an international school exchange programme (Connecting Classrooms) for Rwandan schools and organises international mentoring opportunities for senior personnel.

Other partners include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which leads the child-friendly school (CFS) initiative and has supported primary teacher training, and the Commonwealth of Learning, which helped extend the CFS approach to teacher training and created a bank of open and distance learning materials for formal education. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has assisted with managing a regional INSET programme aimed at Strengthening Maths and Science in Secondary Education (SMASSE). The Peace Corps has supplied teaching volunteers, including English teachers, to rural secondary schools. VVOB (the Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance) has provided management training to head teachers, directors of studies, bursars and secretaries, while VSO has provided education volunteers, including methodology trainers and education management advisers to districts and dioceses, supported REAP and strengthened teacher resource centres. There are also partnerships with the Wellspring Foundation, which delivers INSET through a values-based approach to teaching; and International Education Exchange, which provides training as well as supporting public education in various ways.

The Rwanda English in Action Programme (REAP)

As the main planned intervention to facilitate the transition to English medium in basic education, the Rwanda English in Action Programme (REAP) sets out to address the English language learning needs of more than 50,000 school teachers. Given the high costs of providing residential training to such large numbers, the Ministry of Education's preferred option is a sector-based approach to training, supported by self-directed study and school-based mentoring. A standardised English language assessment tool for measuring teacher proficiency at various levels makes up the final element of REAP and helps ensure all teachers can perform in English to the level required.

Some of the programme's key strategies are motivating teachers and students to learn and use English well; increasing their exposure to, and confidence in, the language; and maximising their opportunities to practise and grow skills in English. There have been a number of achievements to date including:

- A baseline study of teachers' English proficiency.
- Training of 60 national English trainers and 600 district level English trainers.

- Foundation-level English language training for 41,000 teachers.
- Training of the first cohort of 250 school-based mentors.
- Mobilisation of external support for REAP.

District-based intensive, face-to-face training events have been held along with other decentralised inputs such as school-based peer mentoring (of English language and teaching skills) and cluster-based workshops or short training activities.

Seven pillars of REAP

The activities of REAP centre on the following seven pillars:

- 1 Development of reading and writing skills in Kinyarwanda. The focus is on laying a solid foundation in L1 literacy, which forms an essential platform to the development of academic literacy and learning in English at L2.
- 2 Promotion of academic literacy skills in English. To help achieve this, training will be given to English teachers in contemporary methods for teaching L2 so as to support the growth of literacy skills in English across the curriculum.
- 3 Teaching language for use/communication (versus teaching about the language). While some understanding of language structure is helpful to learners, organising language teaching around points of grammar is unlikely to be the most efficient or effective means of promoting actual use of language. To ensure a focus on the latter, English teachers will also be trained in methods of teaching language communicatively.
- 4 Language-supportive subject teaching. This recognises the importance of content and language integrated learning and the need for subject teachers to be aware of the language demands on their learners of their subject textbooks and supplementary materials.
- 5 School-based mentoring of less experienced teachers. The mentors will help fellow teachers address practical issues arising from their teaching and in-service training.
- 6 Teacher resource centres in teacher training colleges with a co-ordinator and adviser to facilitate local training, produce self-access materials, develop co-curricular activities (English days, film clubs, etc.) and co-ordinate the work of the centre as a whole. The centres will be networked by province so they can share ideas and materials, undertake exchange visits and action research and host short seminars, etc., all of which further the programme goals.
- 7 Enriched language and literacy resources in schools and classrooms as an aid to literacy and learning in Kinyarwanda and English. To that end, attention will be paid to developing appropriate school and classroom resources to promote the development of language and literacy skills at local level.

Expected benefits of REAP

REAP is expected to address a major skills gap in the workforce, with school leavers and graduates equipped with English language and communication skills. There will be increased opportunities available for using and practising English in a range of contexts. All teacher educators will be equipped with English proficiency and contemporary training methods so as to be able to produce teachers who are both reflective practitioners and learner-centred professionals. All school teachers and tutors at teacher training colleges (TTCs), colleges of education (CoEs) and the Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) will thus be equipped with English proficiency and modern teaching skills so as to be able to promote high levels of language, literacy and learning achievement.

Schools and teacher training institutions will be furnished with a range of language and literacy support materials, training and materials for use with students, teachers and teacher educators. School clusters will be equipped with school-based mentors to help sustain proficiency gains made by professionals and address teaching-related issues in English-medium instruction. There will be a national network of teacher resource centres to assist REAP implementation and sustain programme achievements.

All those who enter the education system will leave with an English language skill; regardless of their entry point, as long as a person has the aptitude and ability, they can progress along the English proficiency continuum. This will make a valuable and lasting contribution to the quality of education provision and economic development, and Rwanda will be made more competitive in national, regional and international labour markets.

Future plans

Future plans for REAP include providing self-directed English language learning resources to teachers and, as their general English improves, focusing on professional language – classroom language and English for maths, science etc. The training of mentors will be scaled up to the level of one per school cluster. English learning support will be provided to students in core curriculum subjects, and an audio/video materials component will be included for both teachers and students. An English language assessment tool to international standards will be commissioned. Finally, there are also plans to reach at least 75 per cent of the adult population – including parents, school leavers and communities – with English learning materials delivered through media and/or mobile phone platforms.

Emmanuel Muvunyi is Executive Secretary of the TSC.

Dr John Simpson is the British Council's Education and English Adviser in sub-Saharan Africa. Prior to this he provided long-term technical assistance to the Government of Rwanda (2009–2011), including on the transition to English-medium education and systems-wide implementation of language policy, and supported the TSC to initiate reforms in teacher education, management and professionalisation.