



The Economic and Social Research Foundation

TAKNET Policy Brief Series No. 011 - 2010

School competition and student learning rights

Moderated by: Dr. Donatilla Kaino : Synthesized by: Joseph Ibreck

1.0 Introduction

Education as a basic human right and a driving force to individual empowerment and community capacity building is a reality acknowledged world over. Hence the functions of providing and managing education in its diverse and complex setting should be oriented towards the provision of **appropriate** education to help the individual and the community to respond to problems and needs of the present age.

In response to the above demand the Constitution of Tanzania Article 11 obliges the state authority to make appropriate provision for the realization of a person's right to education and ensure that every citizen

shall be free to pursue education in a field of his choice up to the highest level according to his merits and ability in all levels of schools and other higher institutions of learning.

Subsequently, in order to translate constitutional demands for appropriate education, the national policy on provision of education by all schools and institutions ought to prohibit any attempt by the management to truncate the learning process of any of its registered student except when medically boarded or charged with gross indiscipline.

Should the policy be falling short of specific, qualitative and quantitative prescription of the

curriculum, the faculty and facilities, the nation will be doomed to unending inequalities, daunting challenges and prone to ever pervasive class influences in determining people's lives, opportunities and remunerations.

2.0 The Problem Statement

For some years national form four examination results indicate predominance of certain categories of schools – those nationally ranking top ten with good many divisions I and II students and none in IV or failures. Management and staff of those schools are certainly worth of praise for such student's performance.

They have automatically raised the schools' market value and hence the demand for **"quality education"** from them. Entry to such schools is through highly competitive matriculations and to continue to be at those schools requires students' concerted effort through continuous assessment pieces of work demanding above average scores short of which one is **"thrown out"**. It is really toiling but highly paying to students at those schools.

But what a **disaster** to be a "thrown out"? It is trouble everywhere! First with parents trying to relocate their beloved child; but the worst part is with the child's psyche and welfare. Which alternative school will be able to mold this "thrown out" into a confident zealous student eager to pursue suitable education which inculcates knowledge, truth and charity?

Throwing out is done in the name of schools' excellence in supper grade outcomes, completely ignoring the institutions' core function that of nurturing and elevating the

dull and ignorant pupil to a super comprehending citizen who has equal rights to the nation's achieved mentifacts and wealth!

3.0 Objective of discussion:

The public was invited to TAKNET forum to air their views on how the current competition between schools was affecting the learning rights of "thrown out" students and point out whom to blame specifically for the victim's inability to get the grades required in school's continuous assessment.

Furthermore, the invitation asked for proposals of alternative schools' performance reward and recognition system to the present one of number of school's candidates who scored grade I, II and III in their final examinations.

Unfortunately, the topic attracted very few participants who contributed twenty nine (29) entries at frequencies ranging from one to thirteen. The following sections present basic ideas from the discussion.

4.0 An overview of Issues:

4.1 Competitiveness, Ministry's awareness and Private schools.

Competition in education sector is an ever present phenomenon and there is no way a state can ever disband it and remain competitive. This view is supported by the internationally recognized quality levels of education and training achieved by nations and states for the word labour market.

One contributor, M. Sima, argues that we are signatories to internationally set educational goals and targets yet we are not working to achieve the quality intended, thereby violating our children's rights to quality education. We are tampering with the national education hygiene and jeopardizing citizens' and our country's resilience in the face of the ever changing economic order.

Another contributor, Khamis, in his contributions recalls his schooling days and lauds student and teacher

competitiveness, dedication and motivation in schools that were well provided with books, well equipped laboratories and other necessary school facilities. He laments the current poor state of many schools lacking all necessities for teaching and learning.

Even privately owned schools whose fees are high, education given there has no money value paid by desperate parents who themselves got free world class education from the state. In unison with Khamis most contributors lay blame on the Ministry of Education for allowing teachers, managers and school owners to let education get that bad even when the Directorate of School Inspection has always been there tracking the system at all levels to safeguard the dignity of all stakeholders in education.

It is unanimously proposed that some new grand initiative be worked out and urgently put in action by overhauling the education system in order to deliver appropriate

education at all levels by all government authorised schools and institutions with government support through education voucher system. It is only through the voucher system and universal secondary education policy this country will have a healthy school competition gravitated for common good.

4.2 Students' learning rights and deployment of foreign and retired teachers.

Many researches in educational needs in this country, particularly at basic level, pinpoint to big shortages of qualified teachers, classrooms, desks, books and many other teaching facilities. Individuals and non governmental institutions which have gone into education ventures promising to provide better quality education, have instead, aggravated the situation.

The sector is now in such complex problems that not only students' learning rights are violated but its outcomes are unable to

logically reason out issues and express themselves throwing the whole population into fragments and strata of not only the haves and have-nots but also of employable and educated unemployables.

Participants propose that whoever throws out a student from private school on grounds of not performing to school's own set grades should be prosecuted. While non governmental schools and institutions are free to recruit foreign teachers, the government should deliberately adapt a policy that allows the Ministry to search and recruit foreigners in science subjects and foreign languages - areas seriously lacking teachers. We are faced with difficult problems in the education sector which demand tough decisions and actions that will hasten progress but shall not jeopardise our national integrity.

Education is an important component of the second pillar of the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP) - which is Improvements of Quality of

Life and Social Well-being. Hence its provision and ownership have to be closely Monitored and Evaluated (M & E) by the ministry responsible in order to track the planned continuous interventions – so urges Khalfan.

5.0 Proposed course of action:

All raised points and issues to the fact that there exists no specific education provision guidance in the education policy. All piece-

meal projects and programmes that have been carried out with support from development partners is just an attempt to improve the system's functioning. Liberalization of education without specific regulatory authority at the helm is a leap in the dark. It is recommended therefore that:

1. The government should make sure that primary schools have enough qualified teachers and

teaching aids for quality primary education. This may minimize the number of secondary school students being thrown out.

2. Directorate of School Inspection should have enough qualified inspectors to monitor and control quality of education at all levels.

3. Law and regulation be formulated to safeguard the learning rights of the student.

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The Project Coordinator
Tanzania Knowledge Network
Economic and Social Research Foundation
P.O. Box 31226, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
E-mail: taknet@esrf.or.tz, Website: www.taknet.or.tz

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