

# **Towards Managing Educational Institutions for Excellence and Perfection: Reflections**

***Herme J. Mosha***

*Department of Educational Foundations, Management and Life-long Learning  
University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*

## **Abstract**

*Managing educational institutions for excellence and perfection is an article that attempts to draw on good practices in well-performing private denominational schools to illustrate how quality secondary education can be realised in the rest of the system. This follows a national outcry that the quality of secondary education is declining, as demonstrated by poor results in the Certificate of Secondary Education examination. In order to remedy the situation, the writer advocates the need for managers and stakeholders to re-examine the vision, mission and goals of secondary education so that can discern what initiatives need to be institutionalised in order to attain high quality education, excellence and perfection, thereafter to critically review the curriculum package to uncover the needs and expectations, build into the system the requisite capacity to ensure it is effectively being implemented, while constantly seeking feedback, especially from past students and other stakeholders, followed by corrective action.*

## **Introduction**

My forty-two years of service as a teacher, tutor, university academic, a long-service administrator and subsequently manager of educational institutions, strategic planner at micro and macro levels, a policy architect and currently a professor emeritus, have been full of anxiety, hope, dreams and expectations about providing education to realise quality and equity objectives. This dream is far from being realised, because the long-term vision for education has been dispelled. Quality is narrowly defined in terms of the percentage of students getting Divisions I - III, while losing sight of the equity goal—providing an opportunity for every student to do well, which is the cardinal objective of an educational system aspiring to attain excellence. The purpose of this article is to provoke a soul-searching dialogue on how the education provided in denominational Catholic schools and institutions can be designed and implemented to facilitate the realisation of holistic, high quality education on equitable terms, while also striving to attain excellence and perfection. The focus is on Catholic schools for they have, over the past decade, been outshining public and community secondary schools, and so the experience and practices of these schools might shed light on how the other schools can improve their performance, especially now that everyone is concerned

about the steadily declining performance in the Certificate of Secondary Education Examinations.

The article is divided into five parts. The first part deals with an explication of key concepts—management, administration, quality, equity, excellence and perfection. The second focuses on the attributes of institutions aspiring to attain high quality education, excellence and perfection. The third is on the curriculum package while the fourth is on curriculum implementation, followed by concluding remarks. These components have been elaborated on in the subsequent sections.

### **Explication of Concepts**

*Management* is an executive function concerned with vision and policy formulation, planning, organising, co-ordinating, financing, and directing operations in an education system to realise cherished goals and objectives. Related to the concept of management is *leadership*—which is the ability to influence others to take action willingly—with minimum coercion. In the Catholic System of Education, the Bishops and Directors of Education in their Diocese are the managers at the macro level.

However, when one is focusing on operations at the micro institutional level, the Bishop, the Owners and the School Committee or College Board and University Councils are the managers at that level.

School heads are *institutional administrators* who are essentially preoccupied with the day-to-day tasks of overseeing the effective and efficient implementation of the designed programme of instruction at given levels—pre-primary to university. At the institutions of higher learning, however, the VC, DVC and Deans/Directors assume managerial functions, while the heads of departments and other administrative staff are the institutional administrators. In this article, there are instances whereby managers assume administrative functions, depending on the role they play at different times. Hence, the thinking “Towards Managing Catholic Education Institutions for Excellence and Perfection” shall embrace a discussion of managerial, leadership and administrative roles to realise it.

Quality like beauty is a relative concept. In this article, however, quality will refer to the desired state of the education system. *High quality* education needs to focus on developing the child holistically, so that the primary goal of high quality education is, ... “not merely scholastic achievement – [Division 1] - earned through robotic cramming to pass examinations, but also the acquisition of the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and other dispositions needed to be a full participant in society” (Mosha 2006:59). It

should also nurture creativity and innovativeness in all activities, in order to develop self-reliance skills. It must also discourage violence, use of drugs, and consumption of alcohol. In addition, the environment should be cared for at school and subsequently extended to the community. All these attributes of high quality education must be encouraged and, indeed, embedded in actual practice.

The discussion on quality needs to be extended to cover equity, excellence and perfection. Equity is a higher-level goal than equality and quality. The main objective of *equity*-driven policies is to correct imbalances in the system so that everyone receives a high quality education. Although initial screening by our schools is necessary in order not to admit students without the basic knowledge and skills needed to cope with instruction, the subsequent action of “creaming off” does not promote equity.

Related to equity is the striving for *excellence* in the education provided to the children. Education excellence, “involves the extent to which the various stakeholders - learners, parents, teachers, managers, community members and partners in education development - are satisfied with the education provided in both the short and long term (Mosha, 2006: 1). Specifically, an education system must be able to show stakeholders that excellence is being realised at four skill levels: knowledge, social skills, economic self-reliance and academic achievement. To the extent to which this is being attained, stakeholders can appreciate that the classroom is not only a place for learning but also a place of joy. This is the dream that most Catholic schools/ institutions are striving to attain, but with differing degrees of success.

However, even those institutions that are close to attaining excellence in the education they provide may still be far from attaining *perfection*. We often hear of very clever and talented individuals aiming at perfection, who almost clear a GPA scale of 5.0 by scoring a GPA of 4.8, or scoring 100 percent in the grades awarded in an examination, or getting straight A’s in their ordinary and advanced level examinations. Here the goal of perfection starts to make sense. Aeroplanes also have to fly at a given level of precision/perfection to remain aloft. One should not lose sight of precision technology or given levels of preciseness in the medical sciences before one is allowed to practise medicine or a drug is certified for use on human beings, and yet we often lose sight of the importance of this concept in educational practice.

The glaring gaps in knowledge and skills among teachers, managers and leaders do not seem to concern us. The imperfections in what students read, what is taught and what they learn do not seem to bother us. The end result is very worrying. We are now producing graduates, from kindergarten to university level, adorned in gowns, but with very poor language skills, low numerical ability, and half knowledge, quarter knowledge or no knowledge at all in their heads, as well as a lack of skills, desirable

values and aptitudes. Yet those running the system continue to remain unconcerned. The ramifications of such products for society in the future are very serious. Hence the concern for reforming our education system to remove the imperfections ought to be top of the agenda to meet the current and future needs of society. Catholic Schools can, indeed, be the 'salt' that can preserve the nation and save it from deteriorating further.

### **Attributes of Institutions Aspiring to Attain High Quality Education Excellence and Perfection**

Institutions aspiring to provide high quality education, excellence and perfection need to pay special attention to the following attributes. First and foremost their education system and institutions need a clear vision and mission statement.

A *vision* is a statement that is concerned with identifying future aspirations, results and broad outcomes that will set the course for its implementation (Kaufman *et al* 1996). It is an intelligent dream of where the nation/education system wants to be in five, 10, 20 or 50 years to come. A good vision must emphasise the commitment to equity, high standards of excellence and perfection to ensure that our education system produces world-beaters on a large scale to fit into the various sectors of the economy. A good vision statement must also be perceived by stakeholders as having a high degree of integrity. There must be a meeting of minds of school heads at their annual meetings, which would give them a good opportunity to check whether the education system is being guided by a clear vision owned by the stakeholders. A good vision must also have a clear motto, as well as strategies for implementation at all levels—from pre-school to university.

Thereafter, a school has to produce a clear mission statement, outlining its goals and objectives, which should not just be set by managers and administrators. For any reforms to be effective, one has to undertake a thorough diagnosis through a *SWOT analysis* of, say, the Catholic education system to identify its strengths and weaknesses, thus identifying genuine problems on the basis of which goals and objectives can be set. The SWOT analysis should also scan the internal environment of the educational institutions/organisation, and the external environment within which they interact, in order to identify factors that are likely to affect educational outcomes or performance, such as financial and human resources, leadership, facilities, equipment and management systems (Kaufman and Herman 1991).

Opportunities and strengths, on the other hand, are concerned with factors external to the education system—social, economic, political, cultural, demographic, technical and legal—that are likely to affect performance, influence resource allocation and the overall

stability of the country. Rea and Kerzner (1997:22) explain that a SWOT analysis before the setting of the mission statement and goals and objectives ...“helps to prevent myopia, a condition in which decision makers become fixed on existing views without considering the environment in which the systems and institutions operate”.

According to Caruthers and Lott (1981), the *mission statements* of educational institutions should express their social and intellectual aspirations and how those aspirations relate to the overall educational vision of the country. Practically speaking, therefore, in the context of this article, an educational mission statement answers the question: *How does the Catholic education system help the country achieve its national goals and vision?* One may at this juncture wish to know what are the mission and aims of the Catholic Education system. Are they clear to everyone? Owned by all? In simple terms what is the purpose of their existence? A clear mission and aims help to inform action. The SWOT analysis will also help them identify key problems and issues that need to be addressed. To resolve the problems and issues, clear goals and objectives need to be derived. In simple terms, a problem is a measured discrepancy between the actual and the desired situation.

There is a marked difference between a problem area (the symptoms) and the actual problem (the causes and effects). Often we spend an inordinate amount of time discussing the problem area and not the problem. Hence, it is important to realise that in reality problems in an education system/institution are rarely solved; they are resolved. Once problems relating to the striving for high quality education are resolved, they give rise to a desire to attain excellence and ultimately a desire to realise perfection; and no education system can claim to have realised these three goals.

According to Leithwood *et al. al.*, (2006), clearly formulated and articulated school goals and objectives help to bring a focus to both the individual and collective work of teachers and students in a school. They provide motivation and inspiration for the work of school members.

**Goals** represent desirable end results (products) and outcome (impact). They are often set in terms of performance targets that, when met, will lead to resolving the identified problems and realising the aims, mission, and vision articulated in the education policy. Quite often the focus is on output (Division I's) and not on the outcome (whether or not those scoring division I's have also acquired sufficient knowledge, skills, aptitudes and attitudes for problem solving). Schools that have set goals for achieving high quality performance and have been able to attain them need to be commended. Yet, there are a lot more schools that are far from realising them. The main issue to focus on is why?

A *motto* serves as an important means of inspiring and mobilising the public to act on a shared vision. Does the Catholic system of Education and individual institutions have a motto for rallying various stakeholders to ensure the realisation of their vision? To what extent is it jointly owned? Educational institutions implement their vision, mission, goals and objectives through the curriculum.

## **The Curriculum**

High quality education, excellence and perfection are realised through the effective implementation of the curriculum. Many in the education sector tend to confuse the curriculum with the syllabus. The curriculum is the embodiment of a *programme* of learning and includes the philosophy, content, approach and assessment. Coles (2003) argues that the curriculum is much more than a list of topics to be covered in an educational programme, for which the more commonly accepted word is '*syllabus*'. He adds that, first and foremost, a curriculum is a *policy* statement about a piece of education. Second it is *an indication as to the ways* in which that policy is to be realised through a programme of action, guided by aims, goals and objectives. *It is the sum of all the activities, experiences and learning opportunities for which an institution (school, college, university or society) takes responsibility – either deliberately or by default.* This includes a broad concept of the curriculum that embraces the *formal and the informal, the overt and the covert, the recognised and the overlooked, and the intentional and the unintentional.*

Indeed, a curriculum is determined as much by what is *not offered*, and what has been *rejected*, as it is by positive actions, and, very importantly the curriculum *that actually happens*—that is, what is realised in practice—that includes informal contact between teachers and learners as well as among the learners themselves/ This has been termed 'the hidden curriculum' which often has as much influence on what is learnt as the formal curriculum that is written down as a set of intentions. It also includes *what you decide to do on the spur of the moment.* So in fact it is useful to think of there being three faces to a curriculum: the curriculum on paper, the curriculum in action and the curriculum that participants actually learn. Those who have their minds fixed on having, say 80 percent or more of their Form IV or Form VI classes passing in Division I, are narrowly focusing on the implementation of the syllabus, not on the curriculum.

## **Curriculum Implementation**

Successful implementation of the institutional programme and syllabus requires the presence and effective use of the following inputs. First and foremost is *high quality and experienced school leadership.* According to Nzigilwa (2010) and Kapolesya (2010), good academic performance of denominational secondary schools and Catholic Seminaries is influenced by the quality and experience of the school leadership. In the

schools they studied, they found that most school heads had a sound educational background—at least a bachelor’s degree—as well as good instructional leadership and management skills.

Second is *quality of teachers*. Kapolesya (2010) revealed that teachers in these schools were mainly holders of a Diploma in Education, a Bachelors degree or Masters. In the Catholic schools, heads of schools played a major role in recruiting teachers. All applications for teaching posts were addressed to them, and they were the ones who organised interview sessions with the applicants and assessed their suitability for the job. The names of the successful applicants were then sent to the school boards or school owners for final scrutiny, then endorsement. In this way, school heads had greater freedom to choose the type of staff they wanted in their schools than their counterparts in government schools.

Form Six leavers were also recruited to teach in Catholic seminaries but after a while they were sent to Teachers’ Training Colleges (TTC)/universities for professional education. The schools also engaged retired graduate teachers from the area where the schools are located by advertising the posts in churches. Such teachers were very useful to the schools because they were able to demonstrate teaching values and norms to other teachers. They also helped with the upbringing of students.

*Teacher training and experience.* The teachers were also given an opportunity to attend seminars, at the government’s invitation, where they were able to gather information on examination formats, new syllabi, and any other issue concerning curriculum change. The seminars also helped them become familiar with academic changes, thus helping students to learn better. Kapolesya’s (2010) findings further showed that experience matters. The longer a teacher stays in the teaching post the more experience s/he accumulates. Such teachers were more familiar with the different tactics used by NECTA<sup>1</sup> in setting national examinations, which enabled them to prepare students effectively for them. The long stay in one station also meant that the students became very familiar with the teacher, which facilitated the teaching and learning process, including the retention of academic knowledge and skills.

*Teachers’ professional training and commitment.* It is also desirable to have teachers with high academic and professional qualifications who are also committed. Myers (1991) found that effective teaching arises from the teacher’s competence in engaging students in academically focused activities. Their spiritual and moral values were also

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<sup>1</sup> NECTA is the National Examination Council of Tanzania responsible for all examination aspects

considered. Carnoy (2006) observed that the recruitment of well-trained and professionally developed teachers ensures that students master and can manipulate the subject content with ease, with the result that they can tackle examination questions with confidence and handle daily activities with ease.

**Careful selection and enrolment of students, while not losing sight of equity/Catholic virtues.** Kapolesya (2010) found out that the management of schools that performed well selected their students carefully so that they perform well during classroom instruction and in National examinations. Mosha (2000) had earlier found that a school which lacks an admissions procedure for the careful selection of students is likely to obtain poor results. Diagnostic tests given to aspiring students before admitting them to school were expected to serve this purpose. The tests included qualifying and oral tests as well as an investigation into the students' and parents' behaviour, together with their commitment to educational matters, all of which made their children committed to schooling. Carnoy (2006) has also found that schools and school systems that have many children that are ready for school are able to produce high test scores with less effort than children with less academic skills acquired at home. Also students' and parents' positive behaviour in relation to academic excellence can lead to students' good academic performance.

However, what many school managers and institutional administrators in Catholic schools do not understand is that our education system does not provide a level playing field for students competing for places. This was clearly shown in the NIPASHE Newspaper of January 26, 2011. So for competition to be fair, more effort is needed, by maintaining an element of competition for all in our screening tests as the first stage, but also having consideration for average candidates, who had been enrolled in average public primary schools but who are likely to excel if given an opportunity for remediation. By so doing, our schools will practise the principles of equality and equity, as espoused in the Catholic education system, when selecting the best students. Then the second stage should focus on the average student as currently done at Loyola Secondary School in Dar es Salaam.

Twice the number of those below the cut-off point of those likely to be admitted to a second stream should be selected, and subjected to an intensive pre-entry programme for six to eight weeks during the November/December vacation, before half their number is selected after administration of the second test. Parents should pay for the remedial programme. This stream, selected under such a scheme, should continue receiving different treatment—extra assistance during the first term—before they are later integrated into the class of high fliers, at the end of the first term. Experience from the pre-entry programme for girls in science at UDSM has revealed that those who had not been selected originally, but got an opportunity to be enrolled in the pre-entry



programme, subsequently performed better than the best candidates who had been selected.

**Methods of teaching and learning and quality of materials used in the process.**

Kapolesya (2010) further found that the methods used in teaching and learning to enhance performance in Catholic seminaries and denominational schools were questions-and-answers, group discussion, independent studies, field visits and excursions and debates. Carnoy (2006) had earlier observed that, without good teaching methods, it is difficult to improve students' academic achievements.

Group discussions ensured students' success, because they enable the learners to gain a higher level of understanding than they could have achieved from activity-based strategies alone (Mckendre, 2003). Students were also able to teach one another and promote team spirit, co-operation, and competition.

Teachers also used the question-and-answer style, which enabled individuals to answer questions and tested the students' level of comprehension, so that they gained familiarity with the content. They also used the problem-solving approach, which involved the students' ability to think, to search for and apply their knowledge in solving problems. Osaki (2000) contended that the use of a variety of teaching and learning methods assists all students in maximising their learning. Such an approach helps students and teachers to use the time as planned, and the whole class to be actively involved in the subject matter, thus making the subject very interesting. Field visits and excursions enabled students to relate the things taught in class to real-life experience.

Interactive teaching and learning approaches, such as debates and group work, were also commonly used in seminaries and denominational secondary schools. Using all these participatory teaching methods enhances students' learning, as well as promoting a spirit of competition and the drive to excel.

It cannot be assumed that teachers will automatically acquire all such skills. My experience in Japan, Virginia and Michigan State schools in the US, and the Dar es Salaam Agha Khan Primary School Project revealed that opportunities for induction, mentoring, peer coaching and assistance must be institutionalised in order to empower teachers to acquire and effectively use these skills for effective teaching and learning.

**The availability of adequate teaching and learning materials and their effective use.**

As Ward (1994) maintains, one of the factors determining a school's effectiveness is adequate materials such as textbooks, other reading materials, teachers' guides,

sufficient writing materials and well-equipped classrooms. Kapolesya (2010) found that some schools required parents to buy all the textbooks and other materials such as duplicating paper, and all the necessary stationery for students' personal use. Parents also contributed a lot to the construction and maintenance of the school buildings.

I wish to question whether managers, owners and administrators of the schools should be good Catholics. Jesus was born in a manger and came for sinners and the poor like Lazarus, and was born of poor parents. So we need to find out how students from the poor are managing all these demands and whether they are being served by denominational schools without harassment. What options are available to give them hope?

High quality school buildings and laboratory facilities that are well furnished and equipped are needed in order to provide a conducive environment for teaching and learning. However, a study by Nzigilwa (2010) found that it was the effective utilisation of the available resources that enable students to achieve rather than the abundance of such materials in a school. Although some schools had a limited amount of resources, they were efficiently and effectively utilised, hence facilitating students' learning, leading to greater achievement.

Similarly, the parents' commitment to buying learning materials and contributing to the school's progress leads to them closely following up on their children's academic progress, as they want to get good return for their money. Thus, schools with good teaching and learning materials were most likely to have more students working hard at their academic subjects due to the favourable environment.

Dembele (2005) cited in Nzigilwa (2010) contends that, instead of paying greater attention to the availability of material inputs, attention should focus more on the quality of teachers and the teaching process, which are considered to be key elements for improving educational quality. Dembele argues that, unless teachers provide effective instruction and create a classroom environment conducive to learning, students will not achieve at high levels, even when the essential material inputs were available and the curriculum was relevant and well-designed.

**Effective supervision of the instructional programme.** Nzigilwa (2010) revealed that in high-performing schools there were more efficient systems of monitoring teachers' attendance and performance than in low-performing ones. In all high-performing schools, there were active academic committees whose responsibility was to ensure the smooth running of all academic programmes in the schools. The committees were tasked with the responsibility of inspecting teachers' preparation of schemes of work,

logbooks, lesson plans, scheduled tests and examinations, and regular evaluations of academic processes in the classrooms, as well as students' performance in assignments and tests. Hence, to facilitate the attainment of quality education, teachers should not only be available at the school, but should also be effectively teaching in the classrooms where students are.

In his study, Nzigilwa (2010) further discovered that the main reasons for the poor performance of some schools in national examinations were lack of proper supervision of curriculum implementation, ineffective use of time for instructional purposes, and poor school discipline. Hence, there is a need to build *strong leadership* in schools to facilitate the supervision of curriculum implementation and the creation of a favourable school environment for effective teaching and learning.

**Regular monitoring of students' progress.** According to Nzigilwa (2010) and Kipolesya (2010), school heads are required to closely monitor students' progress so as to determine whether they are proceeding according to the school mission and academic targets. Students' progress in the schools sampled was evaluated from two perspectives—namely academic and character assessment. Weekly or monthly tests as well as terminal and annual examinations were used to assess students' academic progress. Hallinger (2003) maintains that supervising and evaluating instruction and monitoring students' progress are among key leadership functions that contribute to school improvement and students' achievement. With regard to communicating students' progress to parents, schools send academic and character assessment reports to them twice a year—June and December—while others send quarterly reports to the parents in March, June, September and December. The parents were also invited to visit the school, whenever the need arose, to discuss their children's progress with teachers and/or the school administration.

**Pass mark for a student to qualify to continue.** Kipolesya (2010) further revealed that most Catholic seminaries and denominational secondary schools had set between 45 percent and 55 percent as the pass mark for a student to continue with his or her studies. The school management, discipline master and spiritual dean call poor-performing students for counselling, and they are provided with extra learning opportunities during their free time. They also encourage them to feel free to ask for assistance from any teacher in the subjects/topics they find difficult as a remedial strategy. These efforts are commendable as competition induces greater effort to produce well educated Tanzanians who are also 'world beaters' (Mosha, 2006).

However, I abhor the practice of 'creaming off' top students, as it discourages and discriminates against less able students and the least endowed parents—represented by Lazarus—from benefiting from high quality education provided in the denominational

schools. Such a practice is also contrary to one of the Millennium Development Goals that high quality education should be provided for all without discrimination (UNICEF, 2005). This practice is carried out when the objective is solely to maintain a good position in examinations.

What is needed is an improvement in the methods of teaching designed to empower the often condemned students to gain hope and opportunities through schooling by levelling the playing field, particularly as regards language, numerical and scientific knowledge and skills. Similarly, competition should be encouraged, not as a means of seeing who crosses the line of success first, but rather to motivate every student to excel/attain better results. Indeed, recent research shows that if more interest were paid to students regarded as slow-learners, they would be able to do just as well at school, if not better, than those students considered bright (Stefanakis, 2002). What is important is for each school to be accountable for each student's performance. What school would like to enrol rejects from other schools, one wonders!

**Feedback from teachers.** Kapolesya (2010) further revealed that most denominational private schools and seminaries are in the habit of giving feedback to their students. Osaki (2000) maintained that feedback from monitoring is an important instrument for improving teaching and learning. Such a habit makes the students work hard at their subjects to discover areas where they have problems and then redress them. This implies that, each week, the student knows the areas in which s/he needs to apply more effort to improve performance.

**Effective use of time.** Time is the most inelastic and the scarcest resource; hence its effective and efficient use is central in instructional programme implementation (Mosha, 2006). Indeed, effective use of time can be made by using methods that compel students to prepare and participate effectively in lessons through debate, experiments, and questions-and-answers. Myers (1990) had earlier observed that *the amount of time students devote to active engagement in learning tasks is an important process variable significantly related to their achievement of outcomes*. Good time management also helps teachers to cover all the content specified in the syllabi. It also allows students to get ample time to revise areas of the subject which they thought needed further clarification.

Nzigilwa (2010) noted that in high-performing schools there were more efficient systems of monitoring teachers' attendance and performance than in low-performing ones. In all high-performing schools there were *class journals*, which kept a record of teachers' attendance and activities in each class. In such journals, there was a column in which students wrote their comments on what had been accomplished during the class,

e.g. teaching, writing notes, doing test, laboratory experiment, or simply “teacher did not come”. Teachers’ accountability in regard to the effective use of time led to improved examination results.

Kapolesya (2010) further found out that those teachers who were unable to teach all their classes because of illness, were assigned special tasks, such as attending seminars on social problems and holding remedial classes to compensate for the periods not taught during the time specified in the school timetable. Remedial classes were conducted during weekends, at night time for boarding schools and during public holidays (Mosha, 2000; Andrews, 2009).

According to Nzigilwa’s (2010) study, students expressed the need for effective utilisation of school time for effective teaching and learning right from the beginning of the academic year, instead of waiting until the advent of exams, when almost every teacher was hurrying to cover the syllabus, which was not beneficial to the students.

Students need to be taught how to manage their time effectively, not only in learning periods and extra-curricular activities but also when doing school tests and examinations. Njabili (1999) disclosed that students needed training in time management when answering test/examination questions. A major fault of most students is that they spend a long time responding to one question, leaving inadequate time for answering other equally crucial questions.

**The significance attached to regular staff meetings.** Kapolesya (2010) also found that staff meetings were held to chart the strategies for attaining school objectives and improving teaching and learning. Normally, meetings create a good atmosphere that promotes co-operation and freedom of expression if well-prepared and effectively conducted. Mbiti (1989) had earlier observed that regular staff meetings are important for the well-being of the school, where issues concerning the schools’ academic status, staff and student discipline, staff welfare and top administration can be discussed.

**A good student government.** The secret of maintaining the effectiveness and liveliness of a school is by promoting two-way communication between the school management and the students through a student government. A study by Mosha and Welford (2002) recommended that school heads should improve their working relations with both the teachers and the students, in order to open the channels for addressing students’ academic and disciplinary problems, as well as being an effective strategy for preparing students to be good future leaders in society.

**Assessment procedures.** Success in academic matters can never be achieved unless there is good assessment of students to ensure that set standards are upheld. This is similar to the observation by Mosha (2000) to the effect that regular assessment of students is useful for providing information that can be used to judge the progress made, and provide timely feedback to the learner, the teacher and educational managers, so that they can take remedial steps to improve performance.

Takala (2001) also observed that in developing countries it is common to use continuous assessment and, at the end of the course, year or programme, there would be a written/practical examination. The aim is to monitor pupils'/students' progress in their studies. Many schools also had a component of character assessment, which helps teachers to discover and promote the useful talents of students.

**Good school discipline.** Kapolesya (2010) further found out that good schools always emphasised good discipline. Ndunguru (1984) maintained that discipline is the state of affairs in which there is order, smoothness, and the lack of friction, turmoil or chaos. Good discipline guides everything in these schools. The bottom line is that everyone in the system—managers, administrators, teachers technical and support staff—must observe good discipline because disobedience or deviation from ethical standards meant going against the principles of good governance, as well as the Christian faith. Okumbe (1998) also observed that educational managers must ensure that all staff members and students are informed about the rules and regulations of the school, and the consequences of breaking them. Good discipline facilitates an environment of co-operation, respect and self-discipline so that the students can study hard in order to excel. It also makes managers, administrators and other stakeholders accountable and feel a sense of responsibility.

**The existence of an incentive package for teachers and students.** If schools are to perform better, there must be a good incentive package for teachers and students. *Teachers' motivation* is the process of arousing direction and sustenance of desirable behaviour (Oyugi, 1992). Furthermore, Okumbe (1998) asserted that motivation is aroused through incentives, which may include salary rise, fringe benefits and public recognition. Good practices include the provision of free accommodation, free electricity, free water, salaries of up to Tshs 1,500,000/=, which are higher than those of teachers in community secondary schools to retain high quality teachers and motivate them to work hard. The best paid teachers in community secondary schools receive between Tshs 634,500/= and Tshs 885,400/= per month, but they do not receive treatment and transport allowances.

In-school strategies for motivating teachers after the Form Four Examination results have been released—cash and in-kind rewards—can lead to a tremendous improvement. I tried this experiment at Kifungilo Secondary School in the late 1990s and it did wonders. I am glad it has been emulated in other schools. One should not, however, lose sight of rewarding all the other teachers who were not involved in the examination classes. In some good schools, all other staff members are given Tshs 20,000/= for their participation and co-operation that contributed to students' examination success (Kapolesya, 2010).

Incentives also help teachers and students to work hard. Teachers motivate students by being committed to teaching and assisting slow learners, while students motivate their teachers when they perform their duties diligently and have good academic performance.

*Students' motivation.* Findings by Kapolesya (2010) further revealed that rewards were not only given for good performance in academic subjects but also to those who excelled in manual work, in speaking English well, general cleanliness and fine and performing arts, as well as being self-disciplined. I wish to add here that students who are not the best performers in class or in given subjects need to be given endeavour awards when they make significant progress by climbing from say 30<sup>th</sup> position to 20<sup>th</sup>. Students in these schools are thus stimulated by healthy competition, which has helped them to attain top positions in the National Examinations for several years. The school administrations recognise their individual efforts and encourage them to maintain their positions. Similarly, improved performance in sports and games, greening the environment (St Joseph-Kilocha is a role model worth emulating), gardening and the like also need to be handsomely rewarded, as they are useful practices for preparing students for a better life in the future.

**Always seek feedback from past students.** Here are a few examples:

### *Student X*

#### **Best practices**

1. *Excellence as a major priority*

By promoting academic excellence (and consequently, being intolerant of under-performance), students learn to push themselves to higher standards. It is a skill that one retains even after the completion of secondary education.

2. *Personal responsibility*

Students are taught to take responsibility for their learning—a skill which I found extremely useful in subjects with poor teachers. It is a skill I still find useful as one is bound to have more poor teachers and managers along their education and career journeys. Learning to teach oneself is always a valuable skill.

3. *Discipline*

Though at times unnecessary and extreme measures were applied, the learning discipline was still a useful component of our education. To succeed, one has to learn how to manage oneself.

### **Worst practices**

1. *Poor English language skills*

Students need to master the language of instruction to understand the material. Poor language skills are at the centre of every teacher's failure, and consequently, every student's poor performance.

2. *Emphasis on knowledge but neglecting analytical skills*

As students we were taught to absorb material, but not to process and apply it. To do so, one needs to master analytical skills. When such skills are lacking, students become muted subordinates, quite able to regurgitate what they are taught but nothing more. The world is moving to an era where information is everywhere; the true test of an educated person is, therefore, not only what you know, but also how you are able to apply this knowledge in a variety of settings.

3. *Lack of a variety of teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles*

A very narrow range of teaching methods only serves to benefit students who identify with these particular methods.

4. *Lack of real life skills such as presentation skills, group work, use of technological tools such as computers, etc.*

Again, this is linked to the point made above that teachers do not utilise a variety of skill sets in setting up their lessons. As a result, students are poorly equipped with essential life and career skills.

5. *Unhealthy (academic-related) teacher/student relationships*

Teachers performed very poorly as guardians and advisers. By instilling a culture of fear, the classroom environment is negatively affected. For example,



mistakes are part of learning, but when students are constantly in fear, they cease to take risks in their learning.

6. *Learning towards the exam and dependency on a national examination that does not recognise continuous assessment*

The major objective was preparing for the national examination. Knowledge was deemed necessary if it applied to possible national examination questions. There was room to explore topics in a broader and more useful way, but this was rarely done. Moreover, unlike other systems such as the International Baccalaureate (IB), which takes into account continuous assessment, the Tanzanian national examination is a 2/3-hour event that determines your entire future. Learning is a process, and I think assessments should reflect that process too.

*Student Y.* Student X's experience resonates well with my experience in School K. I believe the emphasis nowadays should be on training teachers so that they have a contemporary mindset and also on training students how to think and apply their knowledge. There should be an emphasis on understanding the "why" and not simply settling for the "how", and that can only be achieved by allowing students to explore beyond the expected realm. Most of us had an opportunity to catch up and compensate significantly for what we missed out on when we went through the IB programme. But that can be avoided if a lot of changes were to be made at the secondary and advanced levels.

**Conclusion:** We live in a global village, where knowledge is ever expanding, and its application is becoming increasingly important. Our curriculum and teaching methods have to adapt to this reality. We ought to improve our English language training; we have to create a healthy classroom environment; we must equip our teachers with tools that will enable them to teach a variety of skill-sets and accommodate a variety of learning styles; we need to emphasise analytical thinking; and we should re-think the structure of our assessments and the national examination. I think we need to make sure that the Tanzanian student is well-prepared to engage and compete in this global village. Education is central to achieving this goal (Robi and Maua, 2011).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Managing education systems in order to achieve high quality, excellence and perfection ought to be at the top of the agenda of education systems and institutions aspiring to enhance performance holistically. To achieve this goal, there is need to develop a clear vision for the future, a mission statement and objectives involving key stakeholders, who will then need to formulate effective strategies for their realisation. Also an

agreement has to be reached on the curriculum package that is to be implemented to realise the desired outcomes, which should embrace knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and aptitudes so that the learner is developed holistically.

For the system and institutions to realise these aspirations, high quality and experienced leadership and teachers must be in place. The careful selection and enrolment of students needs to be done without losing sight of the issue of equity. Interactive teaching and learning methods need to be promoted, with adequate high quality and relevant teaching and learning materials being provided and effectively used to facilitate the process. On the whole, the academic programme needs to be effectively supervised by departmental heads, deans of schools and internal and external inspectors to identify areas where teachers need professional assistance.

There ought to be a system for the regular monitoring of students' progress, giving feedback and ensuring that timely assistance is provided to the needy ones. In fact, students should be encouraged to maintain high pass marks to qualify to continue, but creaming-off practices should be eliminated in order to promote equity. Instead, remediation programmes need to be introduced to improve language and numerical skills at the admission stage. Management needs to ensure regular feedback is provided to students and parents regarding students' progress. There is also need to ensure that there is the best use of time for effective teaching and learning. Staff meetings, held regularly, will help to provide opportunities for planning, identifying problems and taking remedial action.

Students' government facilitates two-way communication between the school management and the students that can be exploited to address students' academic and discipline problems. Moreover, assessment procedures need to be institutionalised to monitor students' progress, provide feedback on teaching and learning, and take remedial action to improve performance. Furthermore, good discipline and effective governance are needed to minimise friction, prevent pilferage and promote accountability and responsibility in the school system. A lot can also be learnt from past students admitted to world class post-secondary educational institutions, as they can provide feedback on the quality of education they had received. Also a forum of stakeholders can allow the meeting of minds for finding solutions to problems.

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