

Children are in school but not learning

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The enrolment of children in primary and secondary schools is relatively high throughout sub-Saharan Africa. However, the panellists of 'Educational foundations' established that many children are not learning. Besides, there is a big gap between acquired knowledge and employers' demands. This results in high levels of unemployment.

One of the reasons many children are not learning is because schools do not teach in the local language, said Emmanuel Manyasa, executive director at Usawa. 'When children first learn reading and writing in their mother tongue, they are later better capable of learning in other languages as well.' Manyasa, Hester van de Kuilen (PhD student at University of Amsterdam) and Mark Hoeksma (programme leader at Edukans) noted that children from rural areas and poor families are especially prone to these learning issues. Rural schools are disproportionately affected by the fact that the local language is not used in teaching, as well as by a scarcity of teaching materials and overcrowded classes. Van de Kuilen added that in Rwanda teachers work double shifts, which affects their class preparation negatively.



To tackle these issues, Gbeognin Mickael Hounbedji, PhD student at the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies, proposed partnerships between different layers of society, such as government, market and civil society. To reduce unemployment, Hounbedji advises governments to 'try dual study and apprenticeship collaborations between the schools and companies.' That will result in graduates that better suit the profile employers are looking for.

Hoeksma and Van de Kuilen explained that another way to improve children's learning is through 'learner-centred pedagogy'. When children are encouraged to think critically and creatively, they acquire more knowledge than when the teacher merely lectures without the children participating. This approach to learning has received positive feedback from teachers. They were satisfied with the less hierarchical and more 'friendly' relationship that they established with their students. Furthermore, Malawian teachers said they felt empowered during the training. Students' learning outcomes were also positively affected. They felt more motivated and confident, and there was more interaction between boys and girls.

Take-aways

- Students learn better when they are taught in their mother tongue
- The gap between acquired knowledge and employers' demands results in high levels of unemployment
- 'Learner-centred pedagogy' has received positive feedback from teachers and students