



African Virtual University  
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## AVU POLICY BRIEF

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### Can MOOCs and ICTs Help in Training Reflective Teachers and Practitioners in Africa? A Quality Education Challenge

#### Issue at-hand

As Africa continues to grapple with the issue of the increasing shortage of teachers in general, and more importantly of those with the necessary qualifications and competencies to impart quality and relevant education, innovations such as MOOCs could come handy in addressing the dire state of in-service teacher education and training (INSET) on the continent. Indeed, poorly trained and unqualified teachers have become the norm in most classrooms across the continent as the rush to meet the quantitative goals of EFA and MDGs by 2015 had taken precedence over the qualitative ones. The net effect of these policies is that while most of the developed world has made the *Teacher* the cornerstone of their strategies to ensure that their citizens master the 21<sup>st</sup> Century competencies and skills, Africa is reduced to upgrading as best as it can a sub-standard educated, poorly trained and paid teaching force. Finland, in contrast, has demonstrated that its teaching force, one of the best trained and compensated in the world, is at the root of its successes as measured by major international learning achievement assessment tests such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the OECD. Twenty-first Century teachers are supposed to be reflective professionals, meaning that they critically analyze/reflect on their actions and decisions while teaching. They use student-centered pedagogies and their own experiences to improve teaching and learning processes. They also work within communities of practice.

#### *INSET Policies in Africa*

In a report issued in 2015, ADEA and its partners (UNESCO, the International Task Force on Teachers for EFA and the Commonwealth Secretariat) took stock of and assessed the effectiveness of INSET policies and practices in eight countries (Central African Republic, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Zambia) and concluded that these are “often variable and anecdotal resulting in a growing concern about the efficacy of

*existing professional development in meeting the training needs of teachers”*. The following approaches to INSET have been documented: (i) *upgrading teachers’ qualifications through full or part-time courses at the university level*; (ii) *one-off in-service teacher training at designated centers (usually during school breaks)* and (iii) *the school-based training provided by more experienced teachers in their schools*. The first approach to INSET is readily available in most countries but it is costly and takes away a teacher from the classroom for a more or less long period of time. The last two approaches are increasingly used at the basic education levels with varying degrees of success but the study indicates that the school-based approach *gives greater opportunities to provide one-on-one support to individual teachers in their classrooms* and has proven more beneficial to the trainees. However, its implementation has greater financial implications in contexts with huge numbers of teachers to train such as in heavily populated countries.

***Policy Recommendation: Learning from The Open University UK’s TESS-India and its Potential for Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA)***

As a contribution to the AVU’s International Conference in 2016, the Open University UK (OU-UK) submitted a paper on an experimental project it carried out in India in 2015 called *Teacher Education through School-Based Support (TESS-India)* and which involved the production of a set of Open Education Resources (OERs) for training both secondary and elementary school teachers of English, Mathematics and Science, on one hand, and language and literacy resources for elementary teachers on the other hand. In addition to the OERs, OU-UK experimented with a MOOC specifically aimed at providing educators with ***“the opportunity to experience a learner-centered pedagogy that built on their prior knowledge and expertise, and provided collaborative learning experiences”***. Initially designed to train teacher educators, the MOOC eventually benefitted both trainers and trainee teachers. The assumption underpinning this experiment is that teacher educators, if capacitated to design courses that can genuinely model student-centered pedagogy and focus on the practicalities of classroom teaching, have the potential to broker positive change in teaching and learning. In essence, TESS-India is premised on reflective teaching and participatory learning theory being currently promoted around the globe to improve education quality.

**Policy implications**

The OU-UK MOOC experiment was carried out in seven Republic of India states and was “task-based”. It involved weekly contact classes (combination of face-to-face and online learning) of 4 to 6 hours during six weeks and was split into two time periods in the year to accommodate educators who are full-time civil servants. Social media (WhatsApp and Google +) provided platforms for learning and formation of communities of practice in active/participatory learning for the educators. With regard to results and lessons learned, the following have been reported: (i) *the TESS-India MOOC model generated a significant enthusiasm as the average completion rate of MOOCs worldwide (12%) was surpassed as*

*the rate in this specific case was 51%. The use of ICTs (mobile phones and computers) and online learning were cited as additional incentives for completing the course; (ii) face-to-face support is helpful in terms of increasing completion rates but also in building local communities of practice and a support system of partner institutions (colleges of education, universities, district education offices, NGOs and Government education agencies); (iii) Certification and enabling institutions to develop their own certification system are good motivators for completion; (iv) 6 weeks of study with 4 to 6 hours a week is realistic for learning for in-service educators.*

### **Recommendations**

The intention of the Open University is to take the lessons learned from TESS-India and adapt them to their well-known program in Africa: TESSA. However, and as indicated above, implementing such as INSET scheme requires that **African governments** do the following:

- Formulate and implement comprehensive ICT-integration policies throughout the education sector and across all sub sectors where they do not exist. Both pre and in-service teacher education and training require immediate attention in terms of policies and resource allocations. A few countries have already initiated these policies but they need to be taken to scale to reach a critical mass of teachers and learners.
- Develop the capacity to adapt and use MOOCs and OERs to save time and financial resources. Teacher training centers and universities should play a very important role in these areas. AVU Teacher Education OERs and MOOCs are available and should be used.
- Providing incentives for the IT and telephony companies to lower the cost of data bundles and make smart phones accessible to teachers and students.

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