

Aga Khan Academy launch teachers' training to boost Maths, English performance

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The Aga Khan Academy Mombasa has rolled out a training programme for public primary school teachers that is aimed at delivering a near immediate jump in the mean scores of the teachers' pupils – by up to 50 per cent or more in Math and English – as they benefit from new skills in mixed ability teaching, interactive teaching, and positive attention.

Margaret Kalo, a teacher at Kipevu Primary School, said the programme has changed her classroom results in Math from a mean score in the 40s and 50s before she started the programme, to mean scores in the 70s. "The programme has been a blessing to me and my pupils," she said.

Co-funded by the Aga Khan Foundation and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), the CAD 2.5M programme has already trained 127 educational leaders and 1,841 pre-school and primary school teachers in Mombasa, Kilifi and Kwale counties.

As one of the institutions delivering the grant funded training, Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa chooses public school teachers based on needs and value addition opportunity. "The essence of the program is to improve teacher performance," said Mr Isaiah Njagi, Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa's professional development centre monitoring and evaluation officer.

The programme trains teachers in inquiry based student centered methods of teaching, which creates an active learning environment, with students participating in discussions, asking questions and getting interested in peer-to-peer education. This contrasts with the traditional method of teaching where teachers lecture students without necessarily considering whether or not they have understood.

"Before I started the programme, there were aspects of my teaching that I overlooked, like producing less teaching content and thinking that low performers in my class were slow learners or that was their nature. The programme has, however, taught me how to structure my classroom to accommodate learners with different learning capabilities to their benefit," said Kalo.

The drive comes against the backdrop of reports from UNESCO and other bodies showing that poor performance in Math in early childhood has a significant impact on society, causing students to later opt out of valuable courses and job opportunities. A strong early childhood education further reduces drop outs and repetition rates, and improves school grades throughout school, as well as adult productivity.

"Early setbacks in Math and English often put pupils on a path of academic underperformance, as they fall further and further behind, failing to master more complex subjects from the starting point of a weak foundation," said Mr Bill O'Hearn, the Head of the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa. "This makes success at this early stage of education key to achieving a well educated, versatile and skilled society."

The Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa's professional development centre is training teachers from the coastal region based on research they conducted that revealed students at the Coast struggle more with English than students in other regions, as English is a second language that is often not used in their homes or local environments.

The same research found that teachers were also relying on one or two teaching methods, and paying more attention to completing the syllabus than to ensuring that students retain information in class, or

understand the subject matters.

The consequences of these limitations were reported by the 2013 UWEZO report on the Kenyan education system, which found that three out of ten standard seven pupils are unable to read or complete Math problems at standard two level.

For these reasons, the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa's programme is training public school Math teachers in techniques such as using sticks and stones to do addition and subtraction, which sees children much more fully engaged than when they are taught using the blackboard. They are also taught how to encourage students to develop a liking for the subject and how to motivate students to pass, by using methods such as a blackboard with each student's name on it on which they award a star or tick each time a student participates in class. This also helps the teachers to identify the students who are not performing well, for them to receive specialized attention.

In its Programme for Teachers of English (PTE), Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa is additionally training teachers how to use videos, debates, newspapers and radio in their teaching. For example, using videos that teach spelling using animated characters, which removes monotony in a classroom and helps students remain attentive and grasp what is being taught.

The Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa has also drawn ICT into the training programme, at a time when 37 per cent of teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa are reported to have only a beginner level proficiency in ICT, according to the 2013 ICT in Education Study. The ICT in Education Study was designed, commissioned and managed by Connect To Learn, based at the Earth Institute at Columbia University and Millennium Promise, and was led in collaboration with University partners.

"ICT opens up a whole new world for teaching and learning in our classrooms. The teachers are now able to come up with better materials, which improves their teaching while the computers encourage learning for the students," said Dr Gioko Maina, project manager and Vice Principal for Professional Development at the Aga Khan Academy Mombasa.

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