

Innovative project seeks to boost learning at the Coast

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A section of teachers going through a training programme at the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa under instructor Anne Wade from Concordia University in Montreal, Canada.

Students at the Coast struggle more with English than their counterparts in other regions, a report by the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, reveals.

This is mainly because English is a second language that is often not used in their homes or local environments.

The reports shows that a strong early childhood education reduces dropout and repetition rates, and improves school grades throughout school, as well as adult productivity.

It is with this background that the institution rolled out a training programme for public primary school teachers aimed at improving teaching methods in the Coast region, thereby improving education standards, especially in Math and English.

The programme started in November 2013 and has been ongoing ever since.

The initiative trains teachers in inquiry-based, pupil-centred methods of teaching, which creates an active learning environment, with students participating in discussions, asking questions and getting interested in

peer-to-peer education.

“The essence of the programme is to improve teacher performance,” said Isaiah Njagi, the Aga Khan Academy Mombasa’s Professional Development Centre monitoring and evaluation officer.

The programme was co-funded by the Aga Khan Foundation and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development to the tune of the 2.5 million Canadian Dollars (about Sh187.5 million).

Some 127 educational leaders and 1,841 pre-school and primary school teachers in Mombasa, Kilifi and Kwale counties have already benefitted from the programme.

The programme has seen some improvement in the mean scores of classes taught by teachers who have undergone the training.

Math and English subjects have registered some improvement, according to some of the teachers who have participated in the project.

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.

Kalo said different training methods have helped her understand more the pupils she teaches.

“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.

As one of the institutions delivering the training, Aga Khan Academy Mombasa chooses public school teachers based on needs and value addition opportunity.

For selection, teachers have to undergo certain tests and the best performers in the tests are selected for the programme.

The Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa report also indicated that teachers at the Coast mainly rely on one or two teaching methods.

It also established that teachers pay more attention to completing the syllabus than ensuring that students retain information in class or understand the subject matters.

For these reasons, the 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 specialised attention.

These methods are in contrast to the traditional methods of teaching where teachers lecture students

without necessarily considering whether or not they have understood.

“Early setbacks in Math and English often put pupils on a path of academic under-performance, as they fall further and further behind, failing to master more complex subjects from the starting point of a weak foundation,” said 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.”

In its Programme for Teachers of English, 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 removes monotony in a classroom and helps students remain attentive and grasp what is being taught.

The academy 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 Gioko Maina, project manager and Vice Principal for Professional Development at the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa.