



CONFERENCE BRIEF

Re-imagining Education in Kenya:

Reforming Teacher Education for Sustainable Development

Event: 6th Biennial EE4A Conference

Hosts: Education Evidence for Action (EE4A) & Education Deans Forum Kenya (EDF)

Venue: University of Embu, Kenya

Chief Guest: Hon. Julius Migos Ogamba, Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kenya



365

Total Participants



49.3%

Female Representation



24%

Government Actors



3

Days

Introduction

The 6th Biennial Education Evidence for Action (EE4A) Conference, co-hosted with the Education Deans Forum Kenya (EDF) at the University of Embu, brought together a wide range of education stakeholders, including government leaders, academics, and civil society representatives, to discuss pertinent issues affecting the sector. Themed "Re-imagining Education in Kenya: Reforming Teacher Education for Sustainable Development", the conference aimed to showcase the centrality of transforming teacher education not only to align with ongoing education reforms but also to promote sustainable development and ensure it is fit for global development.

The conference was officially graced by Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Education, Mr Julius Migos Ogamba, who underscored the government's growing commitment to evidence-based policy and practice.



Participants

Sector	% Share	% Female
CSO / NGO	34%	50%
Government (National & County)	24%	51.4%
Teachers	14%	29%
Professionals & Academics	28%	56.5%

- 24% of participants were actors from county and national governments, underscoring EE4A's role in linking evidence producers to policy actors. These included heads of directorates from the Ministry of Education and SAGAs.
- 14% were teachers, highlighting EE4A as a platform to demonstrate and showcase innovative classroom practices.
- The conference had near-equal gender representation across participant groups, except among teachers, where the majority were male (71%).
- Less than 1% of participants were individuals with special needs, despite participation and a demonstration desk by the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE).

Conference Overview

Day 0 — Pre-Conference

- Welcome and introductions.
- Six parallel pre-conference sessions across sub-themes: unlocking data; teacher agency and voice; the role of universities in transforming teacher education curriculum; Foundational Learning (FL); education technology; and strengthening the education evidence eco-system for improved FL.
- Keynote speech Part I — sharing on learning poverty by Prof. Wekesa, Daystar University, and on leveraging data on education reform for national development by Prof. Kilemi Mwiria

Day 1 — Opening Ceremony & Evidence Sharing

- Official opening by Cabinet Secretary for Education, Mr Julius Migos Ogamba.
- Keynote speech Part II by Prof. Kwame Akyeampong (GEEAP), reflecting on learning from an African context, not through a deficit lens.
- Parallel evidence sharing across four sub-themes: Teacher Education Policy (6 presentations); Teacher Education and Curriculum Approaches (6); Institutional Leadership (6); and Foundational Learning — two parallel sessions with 10 combined presentations.

Day 2 — Policy Discourse & Action Planning

- Round-table discussions and action planning aligned to three communities of learning: Foundational Learning; Teacher Education Curriculum and Approaches (most preferred by academia); and Institutional Leadership for Curriculum Delivery.

Overall Recommendations

- Policies should be grounded in evidence to provide a solid foundation for informed decision-making.
- Embed data-informed, teacher-led practices that foster a learning culture in educational institutions.
- Strengthen and support research initiatives to ensure evidence is efficiently translated and delivered back to users without delay.
- Increase sustainable, robust funding for education research in Kenya, with a call for the CS to direct the NRF to ringfence funds for education research.
- Enhance gender-transformative policies and practices in Kenya's education sector, recognising that gender equality is key to achieving quality education.
- Equip teachers with practical data-use tools for gathering and assessing data for effective decision-making and strengthen teacher education with evidence-based practices.
- Strengthen continuous teacher professional development to equip teachers with up-to-date skills required of the modern teacher.
- Strengthen FL reform through systemic, multi-actor collaboration encompassing teachers, school leaders, parents, and education policymakers.
- Learn from successful education models in Africa and worldwide to ensure equitable and sustainable education outcomes in Kenya.



Action 1: Urgent Focus on Robust Teacher Education Reforms

Education reforms are crucial for addressing systemic failures and maintaining a relevant, high-quality education that aligns with societal and global progress. Fundamentally, reforms promote equity by giving all children, regardless of background, opportunities for inclusion, active engagement, and access to quality education. However, stakeholders underscored that reforms in teacher education are not properly aligned with curriculum reforms, often taking a catch-up approach at both the university level and teacher training colleges. Existing in-service training is considered insufficient to foster a deeper understanding of education reforms and classroom delivery.

Evidence

- Limited research and evidence exist on current teacher training practices and how they prepare teachers for the modern-day classroom and ongoing curriculum reforms.
- Teachers reported challenges with Competency-Based Education (CBE) implementation due to inadequate preparation and a lack of adapted materials, as well as a poor understanding of curriculum application and relevant pedagogies.
- The Singapore model, incorporating progressive practicum, mentorship, and reflective practice, was presented as a framework for getting teacher education reforms right, producing adaptable teachers who transform classroom practices.
- A South African model utilising structured mentorship demonstrated improved lesson delivery and professional growth among teachers.
- A reciprocal relationship exists between classroom realities and teacher education.

Recommendations

- Develop a national mentorship policy for pre-service and in-service teacher training, modelled on successful frameworks such as South Africa's.
- Align university curricula with CBE to ensure graduates are ready for senior school delivery.
- Institutionalise continuous professional development (CPD) with inclusive, trauma-informed, and conflict-sensitive content.
- Embed classroom realities into teacher training through authentic practicum placements and reflective practice.

Action 2: Elevating Gender Equality in Education

The urgency for gender equality and inclusion in education calls for intentional strategies at all levels of the education system and governance. School leadership, teachers, and school environments play a significant role in promoting gender equality. The conference showcased how teacher training and school practices can dismantle stereotypes and promote inclusive learning environments.

Evidence

- Participating teachers shared experiences of how gender education training improved performance and reduced pregnancy rates in their schools.
- Root causes perpetuating gender inequality includes religion, cultural perceptions and practices that disadvantage girls, as well as gender-blind policies.
- Data gaps exist regarding gender and education, particularly around classroom practices and the intersections of gender, location, and marginalisation — limiting visibility of disadvantaged groups.
- Evidence pointed to gender-norm issues, including women dominating parental engagement sessions while men remain minimally engaged in their children's schooling.



Recommendations

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Action 3: Nine Years into CBE — Little Progress on Foundational Learning for All

Foundational Learning (FL), typically measured by the proportion of children who can read with comprehension and perform basic numeracy, is the basis for lifelong learning. The evidence shared at the conference highlighted alarming gaps in achieving FL for all children, despite their attendance in school.

Evidence

- A 2024 numeracy assessment showed only 5.4% of learners exceeded expectations in basic mathematics. When broken down by operation: multiplication (49%), division (49%), and fractions (33%).
- From the 2023 FLANA system diagnostic assessment, one in every three Grade 6 learners could not read a Grade 3 passage with comprehension.
- Evidence on teaching place values using manipulatives and play-based approaches demonstrated effectiveness in promoting learner-centred pedagogies.
- 48% of learners struggle with numeracy due to poor interpretation and negative attitudes; 33% cite confusing teaching methods. When cognitive conflict was applied effectively, it improved numeracy performance by 97%. Yet only 31% of teachers could apply it effectively.
- A study comparing a texting-based model (NYAF) and a workshop-based model (EducAid) across 50 schools found that NYAF improved school leader practices around supporting FL.
- Structured, low-cost reforms, particularly phonics and play-based methods, are cost-effective strategies to strengthen early learning. Training teachers on play-based pedagogy enhanced literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional learning, with emotional benefits lasting beyond a year.
- No policy currently guides robust implementation and measurement of FL in the early years, despite the existence of KSRAT

Recommendations

- Prioritise early literacy and numeracy using structured, low-cost, proven interventions such as phonics, numeracy error analysis, and play-based learning.
- Support teachers with data-use tools to track learner progress and guide instruction through diagnostic approaches rooted in day-to-day classroom experience.
- Introduce structured mentorship for pre-service teachers.
- Generate more evidence, including longitudinal studies, to continuously inform effective teaching approaches and assess the impact of various reforms.

Action 4: Teaching Foundational Learning for Learners with Disabilities

Learners with learning differences require inclusive, tailored approaches that consider their entry behaviours to understand their needs and personalise both teaching and the learning environment. The conference highlighted the need to adopt inclusive education and assistive technology (AT) as proven ways to teach learners with learning differences, while underscoring the limited data on FL levels among children with special needs.

Recommendations

- Mainstream AT into FL reforms, ensuring every curriculum and teacher training reform includes disability-accessible tools and inclusive pedagogy.
- Encourage local innovation and low-cost solutions, such as tactile learning aids, adapted charts, and sign language apps.
- Advocate for ringfenced budgets to expand AT access and support inclusive ECD and primary education.
- Leverage partnerships between the Ministry of Education, KISE, CSOs, and EdTech innovators to scale AT in schools.
- Develop tools and frameworks to collect data on FL levels among children with special needs and those in stage-based curricula and use evidence to design targeted interventions.



Action 5: Parents as Critical Players in the Pathway to Foundational Learning

Research evidence shows that children whose parents regularly engage in their schooling demonstrate stronger acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills as well as socio-emotional growth. Kenya's CBE underscores the vital role of parents in learning; however, existing parental engagement models remain small-scale and evidence on best practices is limited.

Evidence

- Proven and effective initiatives exist that encourage parental participation. The RELI-PEE model, with four interlinked components: communication, leveraging local resources, collaboration, and capacity sharing, increased parental capacity by up to 26% compared to a control group.
- The model improved parent-teacher communication by 34%, leading to greater parental involvement in school projects and support activities.
- Linkages between parental engagement and learning outcomes remain weak, partly because tested models focus on relational improvements rather than direct learning outcomes.

Conclusions & Recommendations

- Parental empowerment projects are highly effective in enhancing engagement and communication.
- Existing models should be scaled up in rural and marginalised communities.
- Integrate parental engagement strategies into teacher training curricula.



Action 6: Strengthen State and Non-State Collaboration — and Ringfence Government Funding

EE4A has served as an exemplary model illustrating effective partnerships among government, academia, and non-state actors. Nonetheless, global shifts in financing continue to impact both academia and non-state actors. Although Kenya has established a national research fund, there remains no dedicated funding for the education sector.

Progress has been made through the development of a national education strategy that leverages the Harnessing Education Research for Impact in Africa initiative; however, this effort requires further reinforcement to ensure that African-led, contextually relevant research continues to inform the sector. The Ministry of Education, as the custodian of system-wide data, often restricts access to academia and non-state actors, hampering the full potential of such data to improve the delivery of education.

Opening access to these datasets, even a random sample such as 10% of KNBS Census Data, and fostering co-creation with academia could enhance analysis of Grade 3 and Grade 6 assessments to elucidate the value added by CBE and guide interventions to achieve FL.



As we continue with the roll-out of Competency Based Education, we will still require evidence to inform critical decisions for policy and even financial intervention. Indeed, the challenges our education system faces can only be addressed effectively through research and evidence that propose and test viable solutions. This way, we can allocate resources for optimal effect.



Hon. Julius Migos Ogamba, Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kenya



Recommendations

- Strengthen existing collaborations between state and non-state actors to support evidence generation and use.
- Increase domestic funding for education research to reduce reliance on external donors.
- Direct the NRF to create and secure a dedicated research fund for the education sector.
- Open access to the Ministry of Education system data to enable deeper analysis and holistic decision-making.

About EE4A

Established in 2015, EE4A serves as a collaborative platform that connects policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to strengthen education systems through evidence. Over the years, the initiative has successfully convened five biennial conferences, providing a space for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and collective action.

About EDF-Kenya

The Education Deans Forum-Kenya (EDF-K) was launched in 2019 to bring together Deans of Schools of Education from both public and private universities. The forum plays a pivotal role in advancing teacher education reforms and aligning university programmes with Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Together, EE4A and EDF-K have fostered collaboration, innovation, and evidence-driven reforms to improve the quality and relevance of education in Kenya, with a particular focus on preparing teachers to meet the demands of a rapidly changing educational landscape.



Reference

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