

National News

The educationists questioned the mandatory continuous professional development teachers must undertake before renewing their licences.

BY DOROTHY NAGITTA

The National Teachers' Bill of 2024 as passed by Parliament last Thursday has created a sharp divide among educationists.

While most agree on the need for regulation and higher standards, they are split over degree requirements, licensing, and a few other clauses that MPs kept in the Bill.

While the Bill establishes a National Teachers' Council that sets out to regulate, standardise, and develop the profession, Parliament removed a blanket requirement that all teachers must have attained at least a bachelor's degree in order to be registered.

MPs agreed that the Minister of Education and Sports, in consultation with the National Teachers' Council and the National Council for Higher Education, will set eligibility standards for registration through statutory instruments.

The amendment was done after concerns that a fixed degree rule would lock out thousands of experienced teachers, who joined the profession with certificate and diploma qualifications.

Filbert Baguma, the secretary general of the Uganda National Teachers' Union, disagreed with the MPs' move to eliminate the degree requirement, saying that the push for higher qualifications is about strengthening Uganda's education base, and thus, the clause should be reconsidered.

"In all countries which have the best education systems, you will find the minimum teacher qualification is a master's degree. Now, here we have a misconception that when you are going to teach nursery, you don't need to have a degree, yet this is the foundation of education," Mr Baguma said in an interview with the *Daily Monitor*.

Similarly, Patrick Kaboyo, the executive director of the Education Advocacy Network, said a uniform academic qualification standard across all levels would end stigma among teachers.

"We don't need the segregation or discrimination of saying, 'you are a lesser teacher because you are a nursery school teacher or a lesser teacher because you are a primary school teacher. For me, I am superior because I am a

Experts split over Teachers Bill 2024



Teachers and other stakeholders at a workshop in Oyam District last year. PHOTO/FILE

secondary school teacher," Kaboyo said. "Teachers have to be trained with the same qualifications for them to belong to their profession without discrimination."

Kaboyo, who also doubles as the secretary of the Federation of Non-state Education Institutions, said teaching is about human growth and development.

"To bring this person to the class we need as a country requires that this teacher should have knowledge, experience and competence derived from several theories in psychology, in cognitive and psychomotor training," he argued.

However, Vincent Elong, the national chairperson of the Uganda Professional Science Teachers' Union (UPSTU), agreed with lawmakers, saying that the original blanket degree requirement is extreme, especially for nursery and primary teachers.

"We well know that the highest job in Uganda is the office of the President, and the minimum qualification is just Senior Six. Now, if somebody can become a President with a Senior Six qualification, what about becoming a nursery teacher? So, I think Parliament was spot on. It is not necessary," he said.

BACKGROUND

The National Teachers' Bill was passed by Parliament on April 23. It was first introduced to Parliament in 2024 and is now awaiting presidential assent.

The Bill gives legal effect to the National Teachers' Policy approved by Cabinet in 2019, forming the National Teacher Council to regulate the profession.

The Bill's roots go back to a 2013-2014 UNESCO-backed diagnostic study on challenges facing teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa. Uganda was part of that study, and its findings shaped the 2019 National Teachers' Policy.

Elong said the status quo should be maintained, noting that nursery teachers can deliver well with a certificate, primary teachers with a certificate or diploma, whereas a secondary teacher is registered with a degree-level quali-

fication. Despite the disagreement on teachers' registration qualifications, there is consensus that serving teachers should not be pushed out.

Baguma stressed that the law is not retrospective in its application.

"Laws do not work retrospectively. At the time this Grade III (certificate holder) teacher was registered, that was the requirement... and, therefore, this law will not affect this teacher who is already registered. Those who are already in the system will remain there," he said.

According to Baguma, the Bill provides a 10-year grace period from presidential assent for teachers to upgrade.

"If we have a Grade III teacher who is 50 years today, this teacher may not need to now stress himself or herself going for this degree because within 10 years they will be retiring. For younger teachers, there is no reason why you should not aspire to acquire the minimum qualifications that will be needed within the 10 years," he noted.

The educationists also raised concerns about the mandatory continuous professional development that teachers must undertake before renewing their licences. Baguma argued that con-

tinuous professional development is necessary on condition that it does not become a financial burden to teachers.

"The only challenge which we shall not overcome is where the continuous professional development is going to be commercialised. We shall not allow that," he said.

However, Elong expressed belief that the call for continuous professional development is not new and questioned why it is being repackaged.

"Continuous professional development is already on. For example, we have teachers being trained to roll out the new curriculum. Every year, they converge in every region of the country. So, I think maybe they are trying to weed out the people who are dodging this programme," he said.

The Bill also requires teachers to renew their teaching certificates after every four years. Under the new law, the practising certificate shall become a teaching licence.

However, Elong questioned the need and capacity of the responsible entity to manage this process.

"We are about 200,000 in the teaching profession. Now, I'm wondering, after four years, these people will be running to one office for the renewal of the licences," Elong said.

"With the ministry even failing to supervise these schools, I'm wondering how they are going to do it with such big number," he added.

The internship question

Parliament also considered concerns over internship requirements for teachers under Clause 29 and agreed that these be dropped, citing inadequate capacity to supervise teacher internships, among other issues.

Elong backed Parliament, saying internship was not needed because teacher trainees already undergo extensive practical training.

"First of all, these teachers go through school practice that takes about six months. Now, if you again add another internship, it would be a duplicate of what they have already done. So, I think it is not necessary."

However, Kaboyo argued that both school practice and internship should be considered because the current school practice model is inadequate.

The Bill also stipulates that teachers who violate ethical standards should be penalised.

A convicted errant teacher will be imprisoned for five years or pay a fine of Shs1 million.

Teaching licences will be suspended for up to one year for offenders found guilty of teaching without authorisation.