

Interview with

Dr. Betty Ezati

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UNITE Task Force in Uganda



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Interview conducted by Daniel Ergetachew, Gabriel Mekbib, and Kaoru Yamauchi

IICBA: *Thank you so much for joining us. Would you please tell us your name, your organization, and what it is that you do.*

I am Betty Ezati. I work officially at Makerere University, but I also chair the task force to set up a teacher education institution in the country called the Uganda National Institute for Teacher Education (UNITE).

IICBA: *Could you please share why UNITE was created? What is its role and what opportunities that organization provides through UNITE?*

UNITE has not yet been created in the sense that it is not yet functioning, but we are in the process of creating it. The creation of UNITE is a dictate of the national teacher policy that was passed in 2019. Now in that policy, two institutions were mentioned to be set up. One of them is UNITE, the second one is the National Teacher Council.

Now, before the teacher policy, a study was done which showed challenges with teacher education in the country, including issues of standardization, issues of harmonization, issues of professionalism such as low professionalism among the teachers. In terms of the harmonization, UNITE was created to coordinate

the training of teachers from pre-primary, primary to secondary and that included pre-service as well as in-service training. So that is the role that UNITE is expected to take on.

In terms of opportunities, I think effective teacher education leads to better learning outcomes. Because of the changes that keep taking place in society, the need for in-service teaching training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is immense. The opportunities available to UNITE are great, especially in terms of CPD and pre-service teacher education. Well-trained pre-service teachers can reduce the need for CPD in the future.

IICBA: *What types of innovation is UNITE planning?*

First, UNITE is planning to have hands-on training and hence the idea is to have a practicing school next to the teacher training institution that will enable the teacher trainees to practice what they've learned in class on a continuous basis. Because, if you make a teacher go through training for 3 months then they go to the school - they lack the confidence to begin teaching, but if you make them continuously do it, they put into practice the theory they've that they have learned. That is one.

Geographic Coverage of the KIX Africa 19 Hub



The KIX Africa 19 Hub comprises the following 19 partner countries in Anglophone Africa: Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland), South Sudan, Tanzania (mainland and Zanzibar), Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

This interview is part of a series conducted in May 2023 on the occasion of the inception meeting held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for the extension (phase 2) of the KIX Africa 19 Hub project. The transcript of this interview has been slightly edited versus the video version, which is also available on the UNESCO IICBA website.

The Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) and the International Development Research Center (IDRC) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) project aims to meet the needs of national education systems for evidence-based policy. KIX creates spaces for GPE partner countries to share information, innovations, and good practices. Knowledge exchange is facilitated by four regional hubs, including two for Africa: the KIX Africa 21 Hub which covers francophone and lusophone GPE-eligible countries and the KIX Africa 19 Hub which covers anglophone countries. Both hubs function as regional fora within the framework of the KIX project to bring together countries with similar educational, socio-economic and linguistic characteristics for exchanges of experiences.



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Second, there are certain things that we did not have in our curriculum. For example, *how do we effectively teach reading or literacy for the primary school teacher?* Now, we have incorporated these lessons in our curriculum and that course in our programme. We even have a course on sign language. We did not have that because in our system, all learners, including those with special needs, are taught together. Therefore, teachers must be able to communicate with all learners, regardless of their learning style. So, we have a course on that and for us that is still innovative because we did not have it before.

The other innovation is that the curriculum we are developing is competence based and it is closely aligned to the curriculum of pre-primary for those going to teach pre-primary. We think that if the curriculum of teacher training is aligned to the level where they are going to teach, then there should be better teaching going on in at those levels of education.

IICBA: Could you please describe the process behind the inception of the new teacher policy and

how the current implementation is being carried out?

The policy came into being in 2019, but the process started much earlier. I may not be able to speak concretely on the process but in 2014, a study was undertaken on teacher education, which showed many challenges with the training of teachers in the country. As a result of that, the teacher policy was passed in 2019.

Two key things are very important is setting up a national teacher council, which will handle the issue of professionalism. First, we need to address the issue of licensing teachers. This includes ensuring that teachers undertake CPD as this is required for them to be licensed. The second issue is the training of teachers, where you have a unit that will coordinate the way teachers are trained.

So, as I speak now, these two bodies are in the process of establishment. We hope that when they are established that some of the things that were mentioned in the 2014 study will be addressed.

IICBA: Speaking more generally, what are the most important considerations in teacher professional development?

Most important consideration is continuously having the training going on. It is important to have more training at the schools because teachers will face problems that relate directly to learning outcomes. At the school level, the gap in the teacher training is clearer to the head teacher and to the senior teachers who are mentoring the younger teachers. So, the school based, continuous professional development then becomes more critical.

Another consideration is to know the teaching skills gaps that exist and to train especially at the school level. It can be as low as departmental level so that it is not the whole school. Where possible, put teachers into a community of practice based on the subjects that they teach, and in that way, they can have a district level continuous meeting. They can share teaching experiences and address issues that arise while learning from each other. Then teachers can go on to different levels of training, but I think that the critical one is that school based level and then having a community of practice.

IICBA: How can countries prioritize pre-service and in-service training?

I think it is something that is not debatable. If you want to improve learning outcomes, then you need to focus on the teacher. It starts from pre-service, but we should also make sure that there are close linkages between pre-service and in-service so that the things that are being done for in-service people, if these are critical, are factored into the curriculum of pre-primary.

So that by the time the pre-service teacher graduates, this teacher does not need to go through the content that is given during in-service because it is already covered. So, I am looking at a training module where there's close alignment between the in-service and the pre-service, especially components that can get back to the pre-service training. But it is not debatable. We need to prioritize the teacher and ensure that the teacher is well trained if learning outcomes are to be achieved.

IICBA: So, what are the opportunities ahead of UNITE and you?

Especially for in-service training, our policy covers the possibility of upgrading the qualification of our teachers from certificate to diploma and from diploma to degree. The number of teachers at certificate level is huge.

For us to be able to train all those teachers gradually will take a bit of time and UNITE is up for the task. It is prepared for that and that is why in UNITE's planning, we are thinking about blended learning so that we do not pull out the teachers from the schools because they are already working. So, we will have training where we do both online and offline engagements.

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