

Introducing “Student Voices: CSA Official Newsletter” (Special Edition)

Welcome



The Commonwealth Students' Association is proud to introduce this special edition of our official newsletter - **Student Voices**, to be officially launched in 2019.

We aim to empower students of the Commonwealth to influence change in education, contribute to their societies through collaboration with educational stakeholders and ultimately amplify student voices. This newsletter takes us one step closer to accomplishing this goal by showcasing the authentic views of students across regions in the Commonwealth. Each release will bring to the fore various education-related issues along with proposals to be considered.

In this edition, we present our newly installed Regional Correspondents. The main role of correspondents will be to investigate, record and report education and student related news in Commonwealth countries within their regions. We are still searching for correspondents from the Pacific, Africa/Europe and the Caribbean so feel free to recommend someone! Every publication will include a "What's Happening" section, keeping you in the loop with CSA engagements and initiatives.

On behalf of the third CSA Steering Committee, I wish to thank our friends at the Commonwealth Secretariat, global partners and student organizations who continue to assist us in fulfilling our mandate; partnering to achieve SDG 4. Enjoy!

Who Are We?

CSA unifies and represents the needs and aspirations of national student councils and other student organisations in the Commonwealth. CSA was launched in 2012 at the 18CCEM in Mauritius, where student leaders gathered to make recommendations on the current student issues.

Regional Voices

PREP FOR PEP: The Solution to a Modern Education Crisis or a New Frontier of Problems?

Monique Gillett-Chambers - Caribbean Regional Correspondent



In the 21st century, the world is booming with technology, which provides us with access to instant information. The transition from the Industrial Age to a Knowledge Age, is both widespread and pervasive. Knowledge is the most important commodity and those who have it hold power. Entrepreneurship has gained the spotlight as traditional jobs become more redundant. No longer is the average student required to learn text verbatim to fill in the blank to the best of his ability. Rather, it is the student who has the million-dollar idea to create opportunities for himself that will succeed. What then is the modern education crisis? Schools face the challenge of aptly equipping students to compete in a fast paced modern world.

Barnett Berry, Founder, and CEO of the Centre for Teaching Quality, states that 21st century learning means, "...that students master content while producing, synthesizing, and evaluating information from a wide variety of subjects and sources with an understanding of and respect for diverse cultures. Students demonstrate the three Cs: creativity, communication, and collaboration. They demonstrate digital literacy as well as civic responsibility. Virtual tools and open-source software create borderless learning territories for students of all ages, anytime and anywhere. Powerful learning of this nature demands well-prepared teachers who draw on advances in cognitive science and are strategically organized in teams, in and out of cyberspace" [1]. The Primary Exit Profile (PEP), recently implemented in Jamaica, is the proposed solution. A series of assessments which will replace the former Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT), the exam serves the dual purpose of placing students in secondary schools while placing an increased emphasis on assessing 21st century skills. Faced with its fair share of criticism and failures, many lack confidence in the examination. The most recent of its failures being the delay of the Performance Task aspect to March 2019. Are these recent shortcomings, then, a sign that the examination is a problem as opposed to the solution?

Scholars and laymen alike criticize public education for the primary focus on raw test scores as opposed to recognizing and nurturing a child's inherent abilities and talents. Further, there is an absence of technology in the classroom and students lack the knowledge of the usage of these technologies. The Primary Exit Profile, according to the Jamaica Information Service [2], addresses these issues with an emphasis on demonstrating critical reasoning skills in areas outside of the curriculum and application of knowledge to real-life situations. The classroom setting then becomes a creative, supportive and enriching experience for all students regardless of their learning style and ability. Its improvement in other areas where its predecessor lacked is evident, but, still manages to fail in its lacklustre administration.

The New Standard Curriculum (NSC), the basis for PEP, has received poor reception. Its instantaneous implementation has provoked parents, and led many students to panic. Regardless of the provision of workshops to educators, majority are in agreement with the exasperated cry of the JTA (Jamaica Teachers' Association) President, Dr. Garth Anderson, that the "implementation... is on track to fail" [3]. In his commentary to the Gleaner, Mr. Ronald Thwaites, Opposition Spokesman on Education, expressed that the introduction of the curriculum calls for a "new order" [4] which can better be described as a mental shift. This mental shift is not only for the teachers accustomed to presenting information in a frozen

format, but also for students who are no longer required to remember copious amounts of information but approach this information with evaluative thought. Ignorance persists with teachers and parents who do not understand this new format, resulting in high anxiety among the students. The underlying value of the NSC and PEP are then lost if it is that teachers continue their previous style of instruction and if students and their parents are not equipped with an understanding on how to approach this new curriculum.

Change can be an unwelcome phenomenon especially when such a change is happening at a rapid pace. It is no surprise, then, that some of this unrest is a result of this instantaneous implementation. Yet, teachers, parents, and students are far from being ill-equipped according to the Minister of Education for the region, Senator Ruel Reid [5]. Sample papers, online resources, and texts are available, which all parties can access. Nothing good ever came easy, and it is no different with this inevitable change. It is by no means, however, a perfect fit and like any new system has its fair share of pitfalls. In fact, it remains a source of contention to students and teachers who have already encountered it. The mediocre results of the National Pilot Performance Task Exam administered in June of this year, support the perception of a poor reception of the curriculum in schools. Published by the RJRGLEANER Communications group [6], the results showed that of the four subjects administered, English Language was the only one with majority satisfactory performance, 83 percent of students having met the standard. Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies were far lower with 22, 48, and 52 percent of students earning a satisfactory score respectively.

Despite its teething pains, there is still time to change the outcome for the better. The delay and subsequent adjustment to the schedule of the exams, is ample opportunity for vast improvement. Naturally, attaining perfection within our education system will never be possible because of subjectivity. The Primary Exit Profile possesses the right framework and embodies the skills and focus required of the 21st century learner. Likely, with gradual implementation, the exam will prove to be part of a greater solution to the education crisis and will better allow students to matriculate not only to higher levels of education but better adapt and function in our ever changing society. Only time will tell, however, if the subsequent results in 2019 and onward will show massive improvement in Jamaica's educational access and offering.

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The Discourse on India's Learning Outcomes

Rai Sengupta - Asia Regional Correspondent

Where is India headed in the discourse of 'learning outcomes'? Is there a possibility of regulating education based on learning outcomes?



In his paper titled “The Centrality of Education”[1], Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen asserted that school education in India suffers from two primary deficiencies: first, limited coverage and second, poor quality of teaching. The last decade has witnessed significant governmental and policy emphasis being placed on alleviating the first deficiency: the enactment of the Right to Education (RTE) and the implementation of programs such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan have widened the ambit of school coverage and raised enrolment for all age groups by 96% since 2009.

However, the second deficiency- that of poor quality of education, continues to plague India's classrooms. According to the Annual Status of Education (ASER) report [2], published by NGO Pratham, in 2014, only 19% of Class 3 government school students could read a Class 2 book. Out of every 4 students in a Class 3 cohort, only one could perform 2 digit subtractions. Such findings, coupled with India's abysmal performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) [3] where it ranked 73rd out of 74 countries in learning outcomes, point to the stagnant nature of India's education sector and the flattening trajectory of India's learning outcomes.

Against this backdrop, the discourse surrounding the education sector has experienced a pivotal shift in the public domain. A decade back, the focus was on enrolment, on inputs such as teachers and facilities; the emphasis today is output based, and learning outcomes occupy centre stage in the education discourse.

To understand where India's discourse on learning outcomes is headed, it is imperative to understand why its levels of learning continue to be low, in spite of rising enrolment. At the same time, it is also important to take cognizance of the fact that there have been significant learning gains in private schools and remedial education institutions, as has been corroborated by different studies. At the heart of the discourse on learning outcomes is a fundamental distinction between private and government schools- and how the latter need to leverage the foundational tenet of the former: incentives.

The sub-par learning outcomes in India can broadly be explained in terms of three broad trends. First, the poor quality of teaching and lack of monitoring in government schools, the bedrock of India's school system. [4] High levels of teacher absenteeism, lack of stringent regulations and an environment where government school teachers are seldom fired makes for a severe lack of incentives: there is no incentive to come to work as the pay is assured and there is no threat of reprisal.

Second, a centrally assigned inflexible curriculum -that is thrust upon students rather than being customized to their individual learning capacities. This is the neo-centralist view, where the syllabus is prioritized over the child in the name of socio-economic solidarity.

Third, the regulatory environment which places several bureaucratic barriers to the establishment of schools in India, thus placing hurdles to private players and limiting competition in the market for education. This is a particularly serious concern given that private schools are governed by incentives, characterized by higher learning outcomes, lower pay, longer working hours and a frequently employed 'hire and fire' policy. This puts the incentives of the teachers in line with the learning goals of the students.

A study conducted by Karthik Muralidharan and Ventakesh Sundararaman [5] found that providing vouchers to poor students made it financially feasible for them to avail private education and ensured higher learning levels than their counterparts in government schools. Further, Budget Private Schools (BPS) have emerged to cater to the needs of the poorer sections of society, offering a better quality education and greater school choice to lower income households.

The political conversation surrounding the RTE is along the lines of licenses and permissions required to establish schools; furthermore, in his Budget Speech in February 2017, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said that the government has "proposed to introduce a system of measuring annual learning outcomes in schools", these outcomes are however going to be based on class and subject wise minimum learning benchmarks.

The larger policy discourse surrounding learning outcomes seeks to find common ground between the neo pluralists (who believe in allowing various pedagogies, teacher arrangements, profit- and non-profit governance models) and the neo centralists (who believe that the state can override the individual interests of its students). The discourse involves bridging the critical gap between the incentives of government and private schools.

It seeks to understand how to make education more specific to a child's abilities, make learning more accessible and cost effective, to remove the "not for profit" tag from education and treat it like another good in the market, subject to the same laws of competition, quality and pricing. In a sense, the debate on learning outcomes involves providing parents the choice of schools for their child. More choices translate to greater competition and more willingness on part of schools to improve their standards, thus ensuring greater learning.

Thus, moving beyond legal frameworks and homogenization of education, the discourse on learning outcomes is headed towards greater autonomy to families in the school of their choice, greater autonomy to educators in customizing the curriculum and greater autonomy to private players to enter the market.

To that end, it is imperative to analyze the possibility of regulating education based on learning outcomes, which is creating an official framework, applicable to all schools, wherein observable learning forms the basis of policy.

Consider the case of Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), a pedagogical approach wherein students are evaluated at the beginning of the academic year and then grouped according to their differing learning abilities, rather than by age of grade. This method of classifying students according to their basic reading skills and mathematical ability serves to re-orient the syllabus as per their needs, rather than forcing the students to adapt to the syllabus with sub optimal learning outcomes.

A study conducted by the Jameel Poverty Action Lab (JPAL) [6] in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Haryana observed that this method of targeted teaching helped relatively low achieving students attain higher learning scores, across different age groups. Moreover, the Balsakhi intervention by NGO Pratham involved a remedial tutoring system wherein a tutor from the local community was hired to work with the students in primary classes who were falling

behind their peers. This programme too saw tremendous gains in terms of learning outcomes, more so since it was based on the principle of a customized education, specific to the learning needs of the students.

Such interventions testify to the inherent gains in basing education upon learning outcomes, however, continue to remain limited to the purview of NGOs and are yet to be implemented in public funded schools and included in government policy. Nonetheless, the possibility of education being regulated based on learning outcomes is neither far-fetched, nor unrealistic. It requires four forms of restructuring of current policy:

First, it requires the development of a tool to assess the current learning levels of students at the beginning of an academic year or on the onset of an evaluation cycle.

Furthermore, regulating education thus would require continuous evaluation of the students through versions of the same tool to assess whether they should belong to the same learning group or be moved to a level higher/lower, based on their most recent performances. The process needs to be intuitive and dynamic.

Moreover, it requires granting a higher degree of autonomy to teachers in order for them to customize the syllabus for a particular learning level, thus focusing on some topics more than others. For this to happen, education has to be more decentralized and there should be more room for experimentation and non-rote learning teaching methods.

Lastly, in order for this policy to be most effectively implemented, it is imperative to reduce the barriers to entry for private players in the education market. Doing so would encourage greater private participation in this new governmental intervention, one that would be a necessary counterweight to the inefficient performance of the government schools. This would also incentivize the greater emergence of Budget Private Schools, more suited to the needs of the sections of society, which are increasingly demanding better quality education.

Thus, a thriving private-public partnership coupled with a decentralized curriculum and a structured assessment system can serve to ensure that education can be regulated in India on the basis of learning outcomes. While the restructuring of the education sector is likely to take a while and may involve logistical bottlenecks and political opposition, the possibility of it happening exists and cannot be denied.

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SHOUT OUT: Battling Sexual Assaults in Africans' Higher Institutions

Adeyemi Ibrahim - Africa Regional Correspondent



It was an ill-fated month of scandal in April for a Nigerian Professor, Richard Akindele, a lecturer in Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), one of the prestigious Universities in Nigeria. The school popularly known as [OAU made the headlines](#) with the ‘sex-for-mark’ scandal when a female student of the school, Monica Osagie leaked the recording of the telephone conversation between her and the Professor. In the audio, the voice of the Professor was clearly heard demanding for sex- five times for a pass in an exam. Expectedly, the said lecturer denied the allegation, he [said](#) that he deliberately demanded ‘five rounds of sex in one date to discourage Monica, the student from the malpractice’. But then, fact based reports subsequently disclaimed the claims of Professor Akindele. His female students especially, affirmed that it has been Akindele’s propensity to demand to sleep with many female students for good grades. Akindele was later catapulted out of the school and sacked, but his church members pleaded on his behalf to be given the last chance. Should the randy-sex-for-mark Professor be given another chance of harassing another student sexually?

Sexual harassment is ubiquitous, it happens everywhere in the world. There is no doubt about that, unless we want to hide the truth under the garment of lies. Especially in tertiary institutions, female students are commonly harassed and embarrassed sexually and morally. Particularly in Africa, students are vulnerable to sexual extortion. The malfeasance is becoming a general malady in universities, polytechnics, colleges and other higher institutions. Meanwhile, this perilous propensity is massacring the prosperous posterity of the African students.

In Uganda, a similitude of what happened in Nigeria practically occurred; Rachel Njeri exposed a randy university administrator, who wanted to sleep with her in his office. According to the report by AfricaRenewal, Njeri, a student of Makerere University, Uganda was quoted saying: “I tried to resist his actions but he was stronger than me. He grabbed me and threw me on the cabinet files at the corner.” This happened in April, 2018, the same month Monica revealed the sex-for-mark-lecturer in Nigeria to the world.

Flashback: In April 2016, female students at South Africa’s Rhodes University trooped out massively to express their grievances over unbearable number of rapes on their campus. The students went extra-mile to publish the names of 11 male students who had allegedly been involved in sexual violence but have not been tried in any way. Strangely enough, the Rhodes University management denied the allegations.

According to the AfricanRenewal, 1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men are [sexually assaulted while in college](#). For graduate students, 38 percent of females and nearly 1 in 4 males reported [sexual harassment from faculty or staff](#). Roughly half of all such instances included multiple victims of the [same faculty member](#).

About [40 percent of female faculty members and 30 percent of female non-faculty staff members](#) experience sexual harassment.

Colleges and universities have tried to confront the problem, but there is [so much more to do](#). These gaps lead to costly consequences. Sexual harassment and assault drive talented [faculty](#), [staff](#) and [students](#) away from colleges and universities.

BREAKING THE SILENCE ON SEXUAL ABUSE

Microscopically in Africa, female students battle with the venom of the sex-for-mark-rattled-snake. They suffer the pangs of sexual abuse in their various institutions. Silently, the burning fire of the so-called harassments are killing them academically and mentally; yet, little or no effort is made to maim the tense situation of sexual extortion and exploitation. A problem without a technical solution is not a problem; it is rather a curse.

When Monica Osagie broke the silence of how the lecturer demanded to sleep with her for marks, her bold step fueled much actions and reactions from Nigerians. The said lecturer was eventually sacked; he was dealt with despite all his defensive plots. Thereafter, several cases of sex-for-mark scandals filled the air-wave of the social media. Many female students could not bear the I-will-fail-you-if-you-don't-sleep-with-me threat on the side of some shameless dons in our tertiary institutions.

Following the Monica's shout out in May, 2018, a student of the University of Lagos, Nigeria Joy Nwanna, discreetly took the semi-nude picture of a lecturer who intended to forcefully sleep with her and published it. According to Premium Times, the lecturer is a Professor of English and former Vice Chancellor of Tai Solarin University of Education. As if that was not enough, another sex-for-mark scandal followed suit. This time, it was in Lagos State University. In June 2018, a lady who did not disclose her identity partnered with an NGO to expose the predatory lecturer, Sunkanmi Odubunmi in the Economics Department of the school.

Student's unionists and activists have been putting in more efforts to ensure sexual harassment is curbed; else, going to school would be tantamount to going to the forest of the daredevils especially for female students in Africa. Sardonic enough, most of the females are always afraid to advocate for what troubles their minds and mindsets. This is also consequential to the academic setback for some of them. It is no more newsy that female students across higher institutions in Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa and many other countries in the African continent. Does that really mean the problem can no more have a lasting solution?

THE WAY FORWARD

African Students' Union bodies need to show more practical and critical concerns about the disgusting acts and arts of forced sexual inducement. The campaign to stop the nausea on campuses should be the chorus songs in every student's mouth across Africa. Advocacy is not enough, agitation is most needed. Peaceful protest is not enough; propelling pendulum of power needs to be posed to ensure the orderliness of the disorderliness.

Female students also need to speak up! They are the ones with full-grown hair of sexual fatigues but then; they are hardly brave and very grave-blind of what the future has for them. Silence over pain, our people say is the beginning of misfortune. Many office holders in our higher institutions who are culprits of harassing students go school free because of the high level of the timidity in the affected students.

A retired Nigerian Professor at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Remi Sonaiya implied that speaking up is important, supporting and standing by victims all over is more important and taking ground-breaking steps is most especially important in higher schools.

“Unfortunately, many universities don’t have strong deterrence or punishment for abusers. Students should be encouraged to speak out when such things happened,” the man said. “The good thing about such cases becoming public is that it will force the institutions to address them more seriously, if only to protect names. Sadly, our universities have not dealt seriously with the issue of sexual harassment,” he added.

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THE GLORY OF EDUCATION

Lesego Gaetwesepo - Africa Regional Correspondent



The legendary Nelson Mandela once said that education is a powerful tool that can be used to change the world.[1] It goes without saying that knowledge on its own has a very powerful mechanism that does not only change the human mindset but also exposes the capabilities lying within the human mind.

Education has been explicitly expressed as a tool for change, navigating through the complexities of this world, has vividly anchored change within many communities and countries alike and has also unraveled powerful inventions, which have contributed towards global change. Despite having such a powerful surest means, the world continues to

struggle with the means of securing an articulate framework that spells out a system of achieving quality learning for all; including both children and young people globally.

This may explain why, statistics have unraveled the highest record of illiterates among boys and girls as many nations still struggle with creating a shift on certain perceptions.[2] Thematic issues continue to impede students from enjoying such a privilege, leaving many relentless in their endless hopes and dreams of becoming the change they desire.

This however, has not only shattered the dreams of the posterity, but has also left them under-prepared for the competitive market place causing an impediment towards establishing innovative opportunities and thereby, unable to realize progressive sustainable growth.

Therefore, with such it can be highlighted that in order to curb such challenges, there is need to accelerate investments in students and young people as this is an overarching factor towards unlocking demographic dividend and inclusive growth. However, this can only be achieved when governments put in place educational systems that benefit students.[3] To attain such there is a need to uphold the notion of leaving no one behind and hence, a progressive education system should apply to all; including refugees and those in desolate, marginalized areas; as one of the sustainable goals to be achieved by **2030, is to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including disabled people, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.**[4]

Another factor to highlight would be the result -based financing program[5], which in my view champions results, giving hope to the future and current students. The World Bank continues to gradually introduce this program as well as monitor its progressive results. So far, it has been introduced in nations such a Nepal and Mozambique to name a few. This program has assisted ministerial entities in placing their focus on education and the various systems and has also worked towards strengthening the existing national education systems. The aim was to institutionalize measured systems in order to attain lasting impacts, as well as flipping the policy dialogue.[6]

With such a program put in place, and having positive testimonials towards the results, this may be what we need to redeem the glory of education, and enhance government educational

systems in many nations. It will not only increase student capacity but will also help students realize a self- determined future.

In essence, Education is the basis for knowledge and innovation, and a source of growth, empowerment, peace, security and democracy in the 21st century. Therefore it is important to harness on education as it has become the center-stage for change.

[1] The education trends

[2] Education in Africa

[3] World Bank Article on why we believe in result- based financing

[4] Education in Africa pg. 15

[5] World Bank Article on why we believe in result- based financing

[6] Ibid

What's Happening?

Pacific Region



Ketan Lal (front) Re-elected as FNUSA Chair

CSA congratulates our Regional Representative for the Pacific, Ketan Lal on being re-elected as Chair of the Fiji National University Students' Association on December 8th -- an impressive 100% vote in favor of his nomination!



Commonwealth Pacific Regional Youth Leaders and Officials from the Commonwealth Secretariat

The Commonwealth Pacific Regional Youth Leaders Workshop 2018 concluded in Nadi, Fiji. Over 40 youth leaders from across the Pacific countries including CSA's Regional Representative participated in the workshop. The undertaking aimed to boost regional youth participation mechanisms by building capacities of youth leaders in the Pacific region.

Africa and Europe Region



Federal Government meets with ASUU

The Federal Government and the striking Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on December 11th reached a partial agreement to address ongoing strike action. The strike was as a result of the union's demand for implementation of an MOU signed between the union and Nigerian Government in 2009. A large number of Nigerian Students from low income households were mostly affected by the ongoing Strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), spanning across 61 universities.

Get Involved!

Have a story or suggestion to be included in ***Student Voices?*** Feel free to share at csa.socialteam@gmail.com.