

## **Quality Assurance in Education**

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Almost every one of us in Trinidad and Tobago has at one time or another blamed the “government” for the crisis in education. Few of us have paused to reflect on what really went wrong over the past decades in our society. Should the government really be wholly and solely blamed for the state of our education system? This article argues that even if the government’s role is perfectly executed, no education system could be effective without appropriate and responsible behaviour from other stakeholders.

The research literature notes that effective education systems derive their effectiveness from quality teachers, supportive work environments, and a sound institutional framework, characterised by effective quality assurance policies and structures. However, official and popular thought in our society is that quality teachers are those with excellent academic track records. While such thinking may be understandable, it certainly cannot represent an adequate definition of a quality teacher. Teacher quality, as I see it, can be promoted and sustained only if the teacher can demonstrate a sound philosophical base, comprehensive mastery of the required subject content, excellent pedagogical skills, and an understanding of world forces and the environment in which he or she has to operate.

I passionately endorse the view which emphasises that teacher quality thrives best in supportive environments, reinforced by effective teacher preparation, ongoing professional development, democratic and transformational school leadership, the quality of prevailing facilities and resources, collegial support from colleagues, and collaborative support from parents.

Perhaps the most important feature of any education system is its institutional framework. This includes quality assurance policies and structures, the extent to which the system meets the needs of teachers, and the impact of human resource management policies on persons employed in the system.

As far back as the Middle Ages, man has struggled to protect his interests in the workplace. This struggle intensified during the Industrial Age and has now peaked, with more sophisticated modifications. Therefore, it should not be surprising that I am singling out the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers’ Association (TTUTA) as an important component of our education system. To my mind, TTUTA should be the glue that holds the system together. I believe that this organisation has the responsibility for ensuring that the human resource management policies of the Ministry of Education (MOE) are visionary, rational, and humane. In addition, TTUTA not only has the moral authority, but also the mandate to encourage its members to commit themselves to education with the passion and pride required of professionals. Indeed, TTUTA should see itself as a veritable umpire—keeping an eye on the strategic apex of the education system and also spurring its members to greater productivity, caring, and patriotism.

Even if all that I have highlighted above is accepted and applied by stakeholders, experience has taught me that much will still have to be done to ensure that an effective

system prevails. I speak specifically of some ills that currently help to weaken our education system.

A case in point is principals who interpret official policy to suit their convenience and go counter to what the MOE desires. The point is that no quality assurance structure exists to keep principals in check or to ensure that principals do what they are mandated to do. Apart from this, one could question what forces exist in the system to guide and help develop new and veteran principals and vice-principals in effective management and leadership practices. Indeed, it is difficult for me not to conclude that our schools seem to operate as virtual sovereign states with some school leaders doing what they like—often to the detriment of student achievement and teacher morale and motivation.

Another case in point is the escalating growth of the private lessons industry. Generally, this is neither unethical nor harmful. However, what is not commendable is when some teachers seek to profit from the very children they have been mandated to teach. How a teacher could teach a class for the day and then after school seek to give that very class extra lessons at cost still baffles me. To my mind, once a child is in a teacher's class, that teacher is morally bound to help the members of the class to develop and, by extension, achieve.

Yes! It is good and laudable for the MOE to spend considerable funds on education. However, it is even more important for quality assurance structures to be an integral part of the educational system.

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