

**Abstract**

The theoretical concepts and applied methodology of teaching academic subjects are central to the teaching mission of African universities. However, it is an area that African universities have only brushed over in their structural and directional plans. This article evaluates the first mission of African universities, teaching, and the state of pedagogical training among African scholars. It further enquires whether current programs and efforts are enough to solve the problems associated with teaching and learning.

# Teaching Mission and Pedagogy at African Universities

**Harris Andoh**

**T**he mandate given to all African universities during their inception in the 1940s was teaching, research, and community engagement. In the early 1970s, most African universities focused more on teaching than on other core activities such as community service and research. Although they were never considered “teaching institutions” in the traditional sense, it is clear that this description suited them well up until the late 1980s.

Few among the newer missions and strategic plans and policies of African universities include teaching as a core mandate. For instance, Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique declares itself a “fundamentally teaching-driven institution,” the University of Ghana seeks to be a “high quality teaching” institution, and the University of Ibadan in Nigeria mentions “excellent teaching and learning” as its new mission. On the other hand, the University of Namibia and the University of Botswana aim to focus on transnational research in addition to quality education, while Aswan University, a leading university in Egypt, does not even mention teaching in its new mission statement.

The new policies and strategic plans of African universities clearly lack a serious emphasis on teaching as a core mission and on the development of teaching methods and skills of faculty as an explicit objective. Yet, to ensure effective teaching at all levels, pedagogical skills are essential for the transfer of knowledge to the students. The sooner African universities acknowledge teaching as their first mission, the more rapidly they will succeed in improving their teaching structures.

## Key Challenges

To enhance good teaching in African universities, there will be a need to identify the key challenges associated with teaching policies and the weaknesses of current pedagogical efforts. African universities are not seeking to strengthen the teaching of relevant theories and concepts in the various fields of studies. University lecturers focus their teaching discussions in and outside of classrooms on general social concepts, not on pedagogical theories and concepts. There are several key challenges associated with teaching and pedagogical issues in African universities, including appointing academic staff with no teaching background or formal qualification in teaching; the lack of compulsory training for staff as part of teaching development; and the absence of teaching policies to guide universities on how to improve teaching development skills among their staff.

Skills development of academic staff at African universities is focused on research methodology rather than on teaching and learning. Only in South Africa, as a result of its historic past, has the government prioritized the distribution of a Teaching Development Grant (TDG) to universities. Where grants have been awarded, though, the type and quality of pedagogical training offered to staff are insufficient to equip beneficiaries with adequate skills for a teaching career at university level.

Teaching policies will guide universities in promoting quality teaching among their faculty. An online search on African universities’ policies shows that only Stellenbosch University, in South Africa, has a teaching policy adopted in 2018, which seeks to contribute to achieving its Vision and Institutional Strategic Framework. Other prominent universities such as the University of Ghana, the University of Ibadan, and the University of Cape Town either lack a teaching policy or have not made it available online. In contrast, universities in Europe emphasize the importance of academic staff holding teaching qualifications.

A Scopus search on “pedagogy” and “Africa” shows that, apart from South Africa, which has 635 published articles in the field, Ghana, Kenya, and some other African countries

have an average of five in the last 30 years. Further research shows that 62 percent of these publications are primarily on educational research.

The University of Ibadan does not offer any official training on pedagogical skills to its faculty, but instead offers workshops on teaching and learning for newly employed academic staff. At the University of Ghana, there is an initial training program for new staff that has a teaching component. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana provides lecturers with pedagogical skills only upon request. At the University of Cape Town, the New Academics Practitioners' Programme only offers basic teaching skills training to its faculty. The university's Academic Staff Development (ASD), a program including teaching improvement initiatives, aims in addition to develop a culture of reflective practice and continued learning for teachers. The Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa has collaborated with the Haaga Helia University of Applied Science in Finland since 2015 to offer staff a postgraduate diploma in Vocational Teaching, and is by extension considered a leader in the field.

These examples among prominent African universities show that efforts to improve pedagogy have not had a significant impact. To overcome challenges at the levels of the institution and of individual faculty, implementing deeper structural changes in the teaching mission and emphasizing teaching policies and pedagogical training focused on quality should be explicitly prioritized. Good teaching should be the result of sound and accepted pedagogical approaches including behaviorism, constructivism, and social constructivism.

### The Way Forward

African universities should design and implement structured plans to improve good teaching and learning practices. Efforts have been made at the University of Ghana, where discussions have led to the decision to establish a teaching and learning center, but there is a lack of urgency.

A better structured teaching policy should tackle key theoretical issues such as the decolonization of curricula, inclusivity, correctly aligning teaching to the specific content of the subjects, and strengthening the teaching of theoretical concepts and pedagogical approaches needed to enhance teaching and learning. A teaching policy should also include administrative issues such as the weight of teaching as a criterion for staff promotion, and focus on quality and teaching and learning outcomes rather than on the number of years spent teaching.

African universities should acknowledge that teaching without adequate pedagogical skills has an adverse effect on learning outcomes, and that proper and systematic pedagogical training should be included in future strategic plans and transformation agendas of African universities. This is a critical measure in the pursuit of true academic success. Finally, as a means to monitor and evaluate progress in advancing pedagogy at African universities, annual teaching and learning reports to the university senate or governing body should include information on activities undertaken by staff to obtain a recognized teaching qualification. ▲

*These examples among prominent African universities show that efforts to improve pedagogy have not had a significant impact.*

*Harris Andoh is a visiting research and higher education policy evaluation expert at the Directorate of Research & Higher Degrees, Vaal University of Technology, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa, and at the Science and Technology Policy Research Institute (STEPRI) of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Accra, Ghana. E-mail: andoharris@gmail.com.*