

BY MARTIN KITUBI

# Teachers, experts speak out on degree requirement

A section of teachers have welcomed the move to have a bachelor's degree as the minimum requirement, but they are concerned about the limited time set and cost of upgrading.

The requirement to have a degree as a minimum standard for teachers is enshrined in the guidelines for the new National Teachers Policy.

The policy was approved by Cabinet in April and signed by education minister and First Lady Mrs Janet Museveni.

The ministry has embarked on its implementation of the policy and teachers have been given up to 2021 to upgrade.

The new teachers policy covers all teachers in the country, right from nursery to tertiary institutions.

Winnie Atio, a nursery school teacher at Esteem Junior School in Bulenga, Wakiso district, says the target time is not enough for all teachers to upgrade.

Atio, who is upgrading to a diploma, says it is likely to take her six years to obtain a bachelor's degree in primary education at Kyambogo University.

For instance, she said a number of teachers at early childhood centres (nursery schools) have certificates, which makes it impossible for them to obtain degrees in two years.

Atio added that most of the teachers who have upgraded are almost retiring.

Moses Ndibamwe, a school headteacher, said if the Government sticks to the target period, most teachers will be left out.

"It is unrealistic to have all teachers as degree holders by that time. That implies that most of them will be deregistered," he said.

Ndibamwe recommended that those who are below the mark be given more time to upgrade.

"You have to pay a lot to upgrade. University education is expensive and only a few would afford because most are underpaid," he said.

According to Dr Jane Egau, the commissioner of teacher education at the education ministry, the standard



Dr Jane Egau

will address a number of challenges, including teacher remuneration," she said.

## ■ WE NEEDED IT

Genesio Tumuramye, the director at Newcastle High School in Kampala, said the move should have been made a long time ago.

"The standard will help us know who should teach," he said.

Tumuramye said all the 28 teaching staff at his school are degree holders.

George Andama, the headteacher of Mvara Secondary School in Arua, said teachers have been upgrading over the years, but most of them are still paid as Grade V teachers.

"We need a standard such that our teachers' remuneration is improved. There are graduate teachers who are still paid as diploma holders," he said.

Medi Lubega, the director of Mbalala Secondary School in Mukono, said: "Education qualification is not the problem, but the curriculum. We need

## POLICY OBJECTIVES

The policy is aimed at streamlining teacher management for better productivity, discipline, retention and motivation.

The education ministry says the policy will standardise teacher development, qualifications and practice across all levels of education.

It will also rationalise the integration of cross-cutting issues into all aspects of teacher training, management and practice at all levels.

However, the ministry has also set priority areas in the implementation of the policy.

First, the establishment of the National Teachers' Council by an Act of Parliament. Once established, the council will be responsible for registering, licensing and accrediting teachers and implementing the motivation framework and reviewed scheme of service.

Through the policy, the ministry will also prioritise the development and implementation of standards for teaching, institutional leadership and a teacher qualification framework that can be harmonised with the regional frameworks.

to change it."

## ■ CONTRARY VIEW

Steven Atubait, the headteacher of



Fagil Mandy

Mukono Junior School, said the move is not applicable.

He said a degree is just a paper qualification and urged the education ministry to look at quality teacher education.

Atubait, said Grade Three teachers, who are certificate holders, have produced the country's best students, with the highest grades over the years.

"Grade Three teachers are skilled, more competent and confident compared to most graduates. The ministry should conduct a research and see whether graduate teachers are better than diploma and certificate holders," he said.

At his school, Atubait said, most of his teaching staff are Grade Three teachers (17), followed by diploma holders (seven) and five graduates.

Percy Mulamba, one of the teachers, told *Saturday Vision* that the university degree syndrome in Uganda will tear the education fabric of the country.

She said the country has deliberately

taken a costly venture of turning nearly all teacher training colleges into universities.

Through this, she said, the public has come to believe that it is only a university degree that secures a viable future for anyone.

Job Richard Matua, the spokesperson of the Uganda National Science Teachers' Union, said: "There is no need for a nursery school teacher to possess a degree."

James Bagaya from Luweero said: "With my 25-year experience in the education sector, I beg to be guided if teaching primary school children requires one to be a graduate."

## ■ EDUCATIONISTS REACT

The former Uganda National Examination Board chairperson, Fagil Mandy, warned against the move.

He said the main issue that should be addressed is the quality of teacher education as opposed to enrolling for degrees.

"I suggest that the Government reviews what is taught at these colleges rather than make them degree-awarding," Mandy said.

Fred Mwesigwa, the executive director at the Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda, said the move will destroy the education system.

Making PTCs-NTCs degree-awarding institutions, he said, would render them useless.

"These colleges are core technical institutions which offer skills. Universities should concentrate on training managers, whereas these focus on teachers' skills," he said.