

# Marco Tibasima's Cartoon Representations of the Education Crisis in Tanzania

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## Abstract

This paper examines the cartoons of Marco Tibasima, which portray the education system of Tanzania as dysfunctional and heading towards a bleak future. Through cartoons published in *Habari Leo*, NGO booklets, and on his blog, Tibasima provides a diagnosis of the ailing education system in Tanzania. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory, this study identifies different elements of metaphors and metonymy in his cartoons. The cartoons included depict crowded and dilapidated classrooms, inadequate resources, an obsession with exams, the abuse of students, and demoralized and overworked teachers. Since education prepares people for the future, the paper argues that concern for the quality of education is essentially a concern for the future. The commentary implicitly invites the reader to imagine the consequences of the current state of Tanzanian education. Although the critical cartoons do not present programmatic proposals, they are very forward-looking and include an early warning.

**Keywords:** cartoons; cognitive metaphors; visual metonymy; visual metaphors; Tanzanian education

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### **About the author**

Deo S. Ngonyani is an Associate Professor of Linguistics and African Languages with research interests in language documentation, word structure, the structure of Swahili, and Swahili studies in general. He has published grammars of Bantu languages and has explored the structure of Bantu words in work that has appeared in *The Linguistic Review*, *Lingua*, and *Studies in African Linguistics*.

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Political cartoons are recognized as a powerful tool for speaking truth to power and for provoking thoughtful examination of social and political issues (Medhurst and DeSousa 1981; DeSousa and Medhurst 1982; Greenberg 2002; Caswell 2004; Forceville 2008; Swain 2012; Limb 2018; Marín-Arrese 2019). They draw attention to issues in an emotive and humorous manner, triggering reflection, introspection, and a reassessment of the issues. They can present critical perspectives on matters of public interest, stimulate public debate, and sway public opinion. The entertaining, humorous depictions are a very effective tool for dissent, activism, and subversion. Cartoonists are adept at shining light on injustices and corruption while entertaining and educating their audiences.

The role of cartoons as a critical medium in Africa, as well as their artistic presentation, has been a subject of considerable scholarship in recent years. For example, Hammett (2010) discusses cartoons as an indicator of democratic health, while writers such as Callus (2018) and Obadare (2009) examine their disruptive power. Several studies focus on the power of cartoons in criticizing corruption, mismanagement, conflicts, repression, injustice, and economic crises (Bal et al. 2009; Ojo 2015; Hammett et al. 2023). Olaniyan (2018) describes cartoons as a tool for shaming society to do better. Cartoons often call attention to events (Limb 2018) and there are many studies of cartoons that shine light on particular events, such as the traumatic aftermath of the 2007 elections in Kenya (Wekesa 2012) and the COVID-19 pandemic in Tanzania (Lusekelo 2023). Inya and Inya (2021) explore cartoons as a method of coping with hardships and suffering. These studies, among others, reveal vibrant scholarship on cartoons in Africa. In Tanzania, however, studies of cartoons have covered only a few artists and a few issues, such as corruption, gendered images, democracy, and the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. Bwenge

2016; Makukula 2019; Omari 2019; Lusekelo 2023).

In the academic literature, Tibasima's cartoons have not received much attention, although he is a popular and highly regarded artist in Tanzania. This paper explores how Marco Tibasima captures the education crisis in Tanzania and, by implication, the uncertain future of the country's education system. Tibasima portrays Tanzania's education system as dysfunctional. The cartoonist packs criticism into images in a way that parallels verbal metaphors and metonymy. The artist warns, informs, sounds alarms, condemns, and exposes the dysfunction through his images. He also points to the causes of the dysfunction, which include social stratification, corruption, neglect, and lack of resources.

The study uses an approach borrowed from cognitive linguistics to examine the images. In their seminal publication, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that much of our thinking and communication is done through metaphors and metonymy. Using metaphors, we think and conceptualize using terms from one domain (source) to express another domain (target). For example, we use travel or journey terms (source) to talk about life or relationships (target). Through metonymy, we use part of a domain (source) to express the entire domain (target). For example, some speakers use "a set of wheels" to denote a car. Furthermore, it has been established that our cognition is not confined to verbal communication. It may involve images or sounds. This study examines Tibasima's cartoons as images in the realm of visual metaphors and visual metonymy. Visual metaphors are images in one domain (source) used to express another conceptual domain. Visual metonymy, on the other hand, uses images from one conceptual domain (source) to express concepts from a domain they are part of or to which they are closely related in some way (target) (El Refaie 2003; Benczes 2009).

Even though the images in Tibasima's

cartoons depict current reality, they ostensibly deal with a subject matter that is about the future. Education prepares young people for the future. With a dysfunctional education system, young people are not acquiring the skills necessary for their lives going forward. Of particular interest here is the idea that cartoons can serve as an early warning system (Limb 2018). Along this line, it is argued in this paper that Tibasima's bleak picture of the education system is a powerful warning of the impending danger.

The argument is presented in the following six sections. The paper begins by presenting an overview of indicators of the crisis in Tanzania education. The next section provides a conceptual overview of metaphors and metonymy, including both verbal and visual types. Following this, the cartoonist and his cartoons are introduced, with preliminary reference to how metaphor and metonymy function in his work. The next two sections include an analysis of Tibasima's education cartoons, focusing first on cartoons that depict the symptoms of the dysfunction in Tanzanian education, then on the metonymic representation of the causes of the dysfunction. This is followed by some concluding remarks.

### **An education system in crisis**

The education system in Tanzania consists of two years of pre-primary education, seven years of primary education (Standards 1–7), four years of ordinary level secondary education (Forms 1–4), two years of advanced level secondary education (Forms 5–6), and university level, which lasts at least three years. Primary education is compulsory.

Since the early 2000s, the education sector has experienced a rapid expansion in terms of enrolments and the numbers of schools and colleges, due to liberalization of the education sector. However, this expansion has not been complemented by improvements in the quality of education. Many reports indicate that the

majority of students in primary and secondary schools are not acquiring the skills and knowledge required for their grade levels (Chonjo et al. 1996; HakiElimu 2014; Mkumbo 2017; Mosha 2018; Sumra 2018). A study of school children's literacy by Sumra et al. (2015) found that only three out of ten Standard 3 students could read a Standard 2 story in Swahili. In Standard 7, about a quarter of the students cannot read in Swahili. The tests on reading in English, the language of secondary and higher education, are even more alarming. The study indicates that most Standard 7 students are unable to read a Standard 2 story. Most of the instruction in secondary school is in Swahili. The teachers then provide written notes for the students to copy. The students must memorize the materials to answer exam questions in English (Qorro 2006).

Since the 1990s there have been many private schools established at all levels of education. Private schools are expensive and therefore accessible only to families with means. There are glaring disparities between public schools and private schools at both primary and secondary levels. Generally, private schools perform better than public schools (HakiElimu 2014). Private schools have a better teacher-student ratio, better-qualified teachers, more in-service training, a better working and living environment, better infrastructure, and more resources available. The elite send their children to such private schools or abroad. It appears they have little interest in improving public education. Based on the lack of positive change, the stage is set for a reproduction of the social classes. The children of the poor will have a hard time ascending into positions of power and privilege given their meagre educational background. Also, while most people in Tanzania live in rural areas, the majority of private schools are in urban areas (Sumra 2018). This further complicates the problem of unequal access to quality education.

The quality of the teachers and their low morale is another indicator of crisis.

Primary school teachers get their two years of teacher training after ordinary-level education. Secondary school teachers are either university graduates or graduates of two-year teacher training courses after advanced-level secondary education. Teachers are placed in public schools by district authorities, which are responsible for providing housing for the teachers. However, according to a report of the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ III), only about 20% of sixth-grade teachers in Tanzania rated their living conditions as satisfactory (Mhonyiwa et al. 2011, 66). Furthermore, very little in-service training is provided. SACMEQ reported that in the three years leading up to 2011, on average sixth grade teachers had nine days of in-service training (Mhonyiwa et al. 2011, 78). Teachers in public schools are demoralized because of such adverse conditions. In comparison, teachers in private schools enjoy far superior working environments and living conditions (HakiElimu 2014).

Poor infrastructure and the acute shortage of resources in public schools are major signs of a disastrous education system. Crumbling buildings, windows without panes, schools without toilets, and much more are common conditions in Tanzanian schools. SACMEQ III reports that about 59% of the physical facilities are in urgent need of repairs (Mhonyiwa et al. 2011, 127). In classrooms, 36% of sixth-grade teachers had no table or chair. Many secondary schools have no functioning laboratories or libraries. Most students have no access to textbooks. According to SACMEQ III, only 3.5% of students in Standard 6 had reading textbooks and only 2.9% had mathematics textbooks (Mhonyiwa et al. 2011, 146). Students rely entirely on their teachers and cannot seek knowledge from books. Lack of books, laboratories, and equipment, and inferior facilities have led teachers to use lectures as their main method of teaching (Chonjo et al. 1996). With such a bleak picture of education, Tanzania

is heading to a future with severe challenges (Sumra 2018).

Due to the decline in the quality of education, parents and teachers focus more on exams. Both in schools and in private tuition, teachers spend an inordinate amount of time training their students how to answer exam questions. There is a national exam at the end of Standard 7, and another exam upon completing the second year of secondary school. The fourth and sixth years of secondary education end with national examinations, too. The exams are the sole means of assessment for qualifying for the next level. Often people are less interested in what students have learned at school or what skills they have acquired than in exam grades. In the weeks before the national exams, teachers are frantic with exam preparations. Such high stakes in assessment lead to widespread exam malpractices, including exam leakages (Kalolo 2015).

Cartoons by Marco Tibasima capture these problems by using visual metaphors and metonymy. For this reason, an overview of the nature of metaphors and metonymy is presented in the next section.

### **Metaphors and metonymy in cartoons**

Cartoons provide a site for challenging authority, established norms, beliefs, and traditions. They do so using visual rhetorical devices. The devices include caricatures, satire, humour, exaggeration, intertextuality, symbolism, metaphors, and metonymy (Medhurst and DeSousa 1981; DeSousa and Medhurst 1982; El Refaie 2003; Caswell 2004; Forceville 2008; Bal et al. 2009; Yus 2009; Alousque 2013). This article examines the metaphorical and metonymic representations in Tibasima's cartoons. To effectively interpret the metaphors and metonyms in the cartoons, an overview of metaphors and metonyms is in order.

Metaphors and metonymy are traditionally described as figures of speech associated with literary discourses. Since the seminal

publication of *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), metaphors and metonymy are widely recognized as cognitive phenomena in conceptual metaphor and metonymy theory. Understanding metaphors involves mapping terms of a phenomenon within our experience, often very concrete terms (source), to terms of the phenomenon being discussed (target). Essentially, this involves mapping two different domains, the source domain, and the target domain. For example, when someone says, "We have come a long way", they are describing a relationship (target) in terms of a journey (source).

Metonymy also involves cognitive mapping. However, unlike metaphors, the source and the target are in the same domain. Metonymy makes one part as salient and represent the rest. According to Kövecses and Benczes (2010), metonymy "is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same domain" (Kövecses and Benczes 2010, 173). There are many different types of metonyms. For example, *wheels* are part of the target domain, the car, in *a set of wheels*. If someone says *I have new wheels* to mean *I have a new car*, the word *wheels* is a metonym of *car*. However, not all metonymy expresses an entity as being part of the whole. In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, young people often say "*Nipe wekundu wa Msimbazi*" 'Give me the red ones of Msimbazi' to mean 'Give me 10,000 Tanzanian shillings'. Red is the colour of the famous Simba Sports Club. It is also the colour of the 10,000 shilling bank note. The slang, therefore, is derived from an association with something that is red. It is a different kind of association from a part representing a whole. An exploration of the different types of metonyms is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, the basic conceptual structure of the two will suffice to explore metaphors and metonyms in cartoons.

In recent years, research on metaphors and metonymy has expanded to non-linguistic

forms such as visual or pictorial metaphors (El Refaie 2003; Forceville 2008; Yus 2009; Bounegru and Forceville 2011; Alousque 2013). We have more research on multimodal metaphors and metonymy, including verbal, pictorial, gestural, musical, etc. (Forceville 2008). "Visual metaphor involves a mapping of information transferred from one image to another" (Yus 2009, 156). Such mapping is demonstrated in Bal et al.'s (2009) analysis of a cartoon by Zapiro, for example. The cartoon depicted a man preparing to rape a lady while four men held her down (<https://www.zapiro.com/080907st>). The man was a caricature of the former South African president Jacob Zuma, who was accused of rape. Much pressure was brought to bear on the judicial system by the ANC and Zuma's supporters, leading to the final dismissal of the case. The victim of this violence is the justice system, as captioned on her sash in the cartoon. The violation of the justice system is represented metaphorically by the violence against the woman. The image of the rapist, standing above the victim and the men holding her down (his powerful supporters), depicts Zuma violently placing himself above the law. The cartoon was intended to promote sympathy for the real woman in the case and for the target, Lady Justice. That Zuma and his supporters condemned the cartoon and the newspaper shows how emotive and powerful the metaphor is.

Alousque (2013) examines cartoons by Plantu that appeared in January 2008 issues of *Le Monde*. One of the cartoons shows a plane that crashed into the Pentagon. The image of the Pentagon represents the military establishment in the United States. This, Alousque describes as an example of a target-in-source representation of a metonymy. The source of the metonym is the Department of Defence building, and the target is the US military. The building (the source) is part of the military establishment (the target). The Pentagon (part of the military establishment) is a metonymic representation of the entire military

establishment. One can expand the scope and suggest that the image of the crashed plane and the Pentagon represent the attack on the USA that occurred on September 11, 2001. The caricature of Osama bin Laden, which is fused with the image of a spider on its web, represented Bin Laden's organization and its expanding power. The target of the metonym is Bin Laden, but the source is the spider. This is a metaphorical representation.

As shown in many studies, metaphors and metonyms are essential techniques for effective cartoons. They are important tools for encoding layers of meaning and effectively expressing opinion. The next three sections examine these tools and uncover Tibasima's diagnosis of the education system in Tanzania.

### Tibasima and his work

Marco Tibasima is a cartoonist, illustrator, and graphic designer who first gained fame in the popular Dar es Salaam cartoon magazine *Sani*, a magazine that was started by Said Bawji and Nicco ye Mbajo (see Uta Reuster-Jahn's article on Nicco ye Mbajo in this issue). Tibasima is an artist whose insightful cartoons distinguish him as a thoughtful social critic and education activist. For more than 28 years, he has worked as a freelance artist in Dar es Salaam, working for many NGOs. Many of his pieces were done for Human Rights Watch, HakiElimu (an education advocacy group in Tanzania), and Twaweza (a Tanzanian NGO). The organizations commissioned cartoons, posters, and comic strips for various education and human rights campaigns. In many of the cartoons, Tibasima presents himself as a commentator in the image of a tortoise, Ka Kobe (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Kobe* is the Swahili word for tortoise. With some poetic license, the artist adds *Ka* before *Kobe* to cleverly present comments. In colloquial Swahili, *Ka* is an affectionate short form of *kaka* 'brother'. *Ka-* may also appear as a diminutive prefix. Had he written it as *Kakobe* it would have meant 'little tortoise'. Therefore, the name is ambiguous. Another famous animal commentator in cartoons is *Kipanya* (literally 'little mouse'), who appears in

In many East African folktales, the tortoise, though slow, is a wise creature. This representation of himself is most likely to underline his role as a sarcastic commentator.



Figure 1: Ka Kobe. This image is taken from <http://marcotibasima.blogspot.com>. First published July 26, 2014. All images attributed to 'Ka Kobe' are used with the generous permission of Marco Tibasima from <http://marcotibasima.blogspot.com>.

The cartoons in this study have appeared in *Habari Leo* (a government daily), in publications of HakiElimu and Human Rights Watch, and on Tibasima's blog. The cartoons that appeared in *Habari Leo* are editorial cartoons. These outlets suggest that the cartoons are most likely to be intended for the educated, the political elite, and the public. There is a history of the intimidation and arrest of cartoonists in Tanzania (see, for example, the case of Optatus Fwema in the report of Reporters Without Borders, 2021). It is not clear how the government reacts to the criticism of Tibasima. Perhaps since the images that are critical of the education system do not depict any particular person, there has been no severe backlash, at least nothing that has been reported by the artist, the daily newspapers, or the NGOs.

Political cartoons express opinions about an issue, personality, event, or situation in the real world, not in the imaginary world for entertainment. These are expressions of the artist's opinion and are signed by him. They are analogous to editorials and op-eds in newspapers (Caswell 2004). The general picture of Tanzania's education in Tibasima's cartoons is

Masoudi Kipanya's cartoons.

that it is a disaster and an unmitigated calamity. The cartoons can be grouped into those that describe the symptoms of the dysfunctional education system in Tanzania and those that describe the causes of the dysfunction. While all the cartoons capture the present reality, they inherently and at times explicitly warn about an imagined future. A concern for the quality of education is a concern for the future of those receiving education and for the society more broadly.

There are source images and target images in verbal or linguistic metaphors. I use two images here to illustrate metaphorical and metonymic mapping in Tibasima's cartoons. In the following sections, the mapping will be linked to two themes, namely the symptoms and the causes of the dysfunction. The mapping can be

illustrated by Tibasima's cartoon depicting a decrepit bus labelled *Elimu Bongo* 'Tanzanian Education' (Figure 2). In other words, the bus is a visual metaphor for Tanzanian education.

The cartoonist labels different items using the visual metaphor. A passenger is yelling "Dereva umeshindwa kazi, toka waendeshe wengine" 'Driver, you have failed. Get out and let others drive.' On the bus there are also the words *Tutafika kesho* 'We will reach our destination tomorrow.' Despite its expressed optimism, *kesho* 'tomorrow' suggests a pessimistic outlook because tomorrow is a day that will never come. In other words, there is no hope for a better future with this kind of education. There are several weights on top of the bus: *Miji-ziro* 'Failing grades', *Mitaala feki* 'Fake curricula', *Mbinu hoi* 'outdated

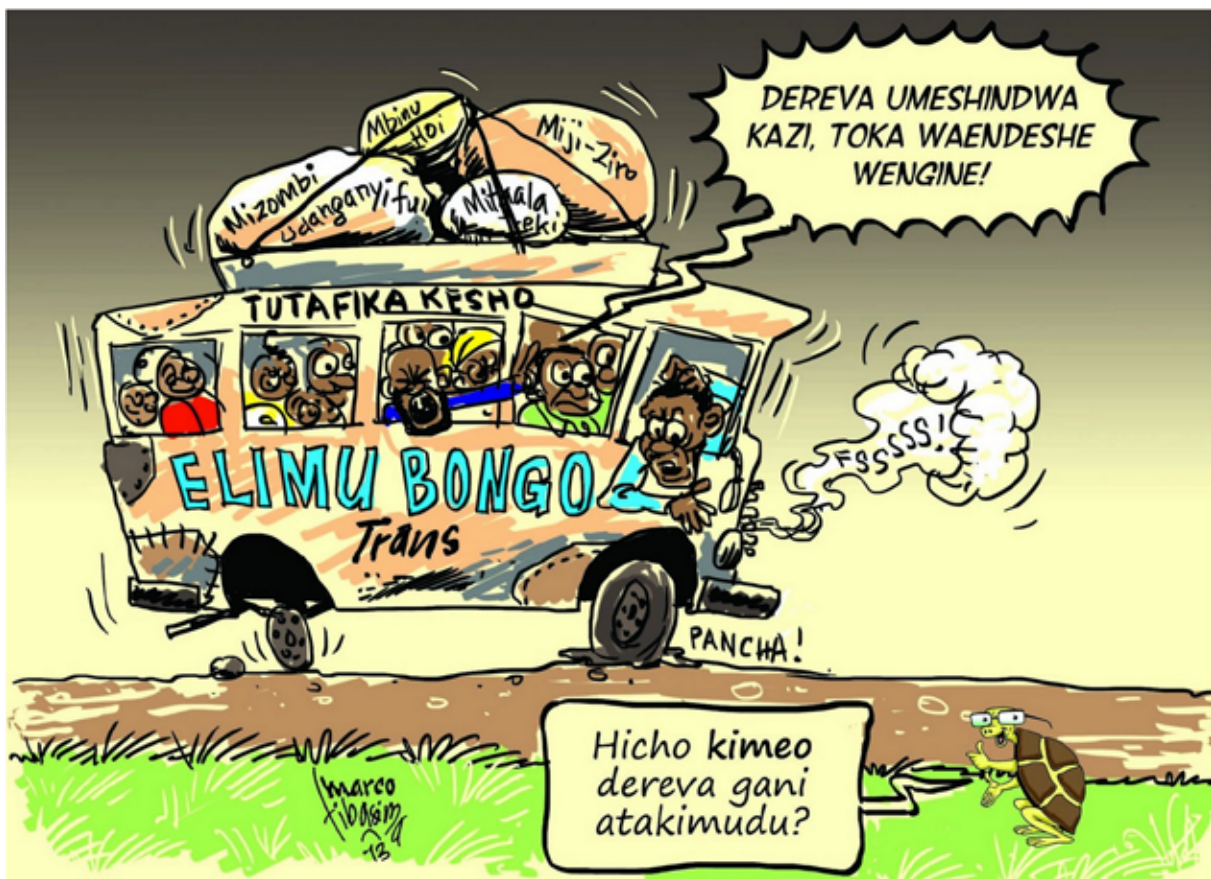


Figure 2: Ka Kobe Elimu Bongo. Image first published on <http://marcotibasima.blogspot.com>, June 5, 2013. Used with permission.



(teaching) methods', *Udanganyifu* 'Cheating', and *Mizombi* 'Students who only memorize'. While the rear wheels are missing, the front tyres are flat (*pancha*). Ka Kobe comments "Hicho kimeo dereva gani atakimudu" 'Who can drive that broken down vehicle?'

The stranded bus is a metaphor for a broken-down education system (Figure 3). The education system is supposed to carry society to a prosperous future. The bus is even labelled *Tutafika kesho* 'We will reach the destination tomorrow.' The bus has a driver and passengers, who can be mapped to the Education Minister and other stakeholders. Missing wheels and flat tyres map to a lack of necessary resources for the efficient operation of the education sector.

| Source       | Target                           |
|--------------|----------------------------------|
| decrepit bus | → dysfunctional education system |
| driver       | → Minister of Education          |
| passengers   | → stakeholders                   |
| weights      | → problems                       |
| movement     | → education progress             |
| wheels       | → necessary resources            |

Figure 3: Mapping the bus metaphor.

The metaphor expresses the cartoonist's view that Tanzania has an uncertain future with such education. The driver is supposed to be the leader who takes the education sector into the future. Ka Kobe appears to suggest that, given the present conditions, there is nobody who can provide leadership that will make a difference. The stranded vehicle symbolizes a lack of progress and a bleak future.

In visual metonymy, a visual representation of a target phenomenon can be created through a visual image of another phenomenon that includes the target phenomenon or that is closely related to the target. Consider Figure 4.

A small first-grade building is filled with students to the roof. The teacher is pushing in more and more, so that all the students can get into the classroom. A man labelled *siri-kali* 'top secret', which is a distortion of *serikali* 'government', is watching the spectacle with the utmost satisfaction: "Zoezi la uandikishaji darasa la kwanza limefanikiwa sana. Unaona?" 'The enrolment of students has been most successful. See?' The tortoise wonders, "Vipi kuhusu ubora wa elimu wanayopata?" 'What about the quality of the education?'



Figure 4: First-grade student enrolment

In this cartoon, the school stands for the entire education system, which thrives on and takes pride in large numbers of enrolled students rather than quality education. This example of an overcrowded classroom represents the obsession with big numbers and the obvious consequences of bad education. Notice that the images are combined with verbal communication – metaphors and metonymy overlap. They are not mutually exclusive. The entire education system is captured by the building and the chaos surrounding it. The metonymy is in the image of the school, the source, representing the bigger picture of the education system, the target. The building is a metaphor for the education system, and it represents schools as part of the education system, in which case it is also a metonymy.

Having introduced Tibasima and his cartoons, the remainder of this study examines how the artist conveys messages and communicates his ideas in four images that represent the symptoms of dysfunctional education and five images that identify the causes.

### The symptoms of a dysfunctional education

As highlighted earlier, the education system in Tanzania is plagued by several challenges, including inadequate facilities, shortages of books, demoralized and underpaid teachers, the use of English, a language which most secondary school students cannot speak, reliance on exams rather than quality of education, lack of in-service professional development, and much more. Four cartoons capture the dysfunctionality of the education system in Tanzania. The first cartoon I consider representative of the symptoms is “Imagine the chemistry experiment” (Figure 5).

This is a caricature of a chemistry class where the teacher instructs the students to imagine a test tube and a beaker that she has drawn on the board. The students are supposed to understand the entire scientific method in chemistry by imagining, rather than by experiencing and conducting the experiment themselves. Instead, students are left to memorize some facts without adequately



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Figure 5: Imagine the chemistry experiment. Image first published in Human Rights Watch (2017), licenced under CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 US DEED.

understanding the rich inquiry in the field. The teacher appears desperate to get the students to understand, but the caricature of the students' bewilderment and confusion leaves no doubt that something is seriously wrong. This situation occurs in hundreds of schools that do not have science labs (see, for example, Chonjo et al. 1996; Mhonyiwa et al. 2011).

This caricature is a metonymic representation of a constellation of real problems in schools resulting from inadequate facilities due to insufficient investment in education. Many schools lack even a basic laboratory or equipment for actual experiments. Libraries are non-existent, and classrooms may not even

have desks. The cartoon classroom looks neat compared to what is in most schools. Many teachers work without the necessary supplies for their job. The deficiency of classroom facilities and equipment is only one of them. It is a subset of the target domain of problems. The lack of apparatus in this image is one challenge that is metonymically represented as the problem. The outcomes of such an education are not hard to imagine: a society left behind in this fast-moving world of science and technology.

"A teacher's life" is a cartoon that shows a teacher in terrible living and working conditions (Figure 6).



Figure 6: A teacher's life. Image first published in HakiElimu (2005). Used with permission.

The cartoon depicts a teacher at home, where the roof simply lets in all the rain. As the floor is slowly flooding, he takes refuge on the table (he does not have a chair). He shelters under a patched-up old umbrella. There is an oversized pile of student notebooks (*madaftari*) that he

is correcting as the rain pours onto him. There is no electricity, so he uses a single old-style kerosene lamp. The door cannot close properly and is only held shut by a log. There is a radio broadcast saying "Na shilingi Bilioni desh desh zimetolewa na serikali kukarabati jengo

*la Benki ya Darisalama...* "The government has made available several billion shillings for the repair of the Bank of Darisalama [Dar es Salaam]. The teacher thinks, "*Hali hii kwetu walimu mpaka lini? Tumechoka!*" 'For how long do we, teachers, have to endure this? We cannot take it anymore.' The commentator, Ka Kobe, remarks, "*Mh! Hata chini ya mwembe kuna unafuu*" "The condition under the mango tree is far better (than this).' That is to say that whatever this structure is, it is worse than just working under a mango tree, an exaggeration.

Teachers are usually posted to schools where they are accommodated in school-houses. Often the school area is not their permanent home. They do not buy or build

houses in such temporary locations. Therefore, they are at the mercy of the district councils and the schools for their accommodation. This caricature of the teacher's residence is another example of a metonymic representation of the poor living conditions of the teachers. The artist cleverly packs in several issues, including lousy residences, lack of electricity and water, overwork, and hypocritical and cynical pronouncements from the government that show a total lack of interest in the welfare of the teachers and the schools.

I have called the next pair of images "Weighing the cow in order to fatten it" (Figure 7). They depict the national obsession with exams.



Figure 7: Weighing the cow in order to fatten it. Image first published in HakiElimu (2005). Used with permission.

On the left side of the cartoon it reads, *Siku za Kawaida* 'Average Days'. There is an announcement on the blackboard: *Jisomeeni-Someeni tu! No ticha*. 'Just study on your own. There is no teacher.' The atmosphere is very relaxed, with students discussing yesterday's football game ("*Ebanae! Jana uliwaona Manchesta?*" 'Man, did you see the Manchester United

game yesterday?'), laughing, throwing things around, and even dozing off. The image on the right is titled *Mitihani Ikaribia* 'Close to Exams'. There are three agitated teachers in the classroom and a satisfied education officer, who is visiting the school. One teacher is at the blackboard teaching maths, another is teaching English, and the third is doing a practice

*past pepa* 'a past exam'. The English teacher is teaching a very strange variety of English, with sentences like, "Yuu ze weki ze *Inglishi wea?*" 'You, where is your English assignment?' This alludes to the rampant problem of low English proficiency on the part of Tanzanian teachers. The faces of the students are filled with tension, anxiety, fear, and confusion. The tortoise sarcastically remarks, "Jaza! Jaza! *Shindilia kabisa. Lazima wote wafaulu!*" 'Fill their brains up (make them memorize)! Fill their brains up! Pack in all knowledge. They must all pass their exams.' Implicit in the cartoon is the question: What use is such education for the future of the students and society?

The first image depicts the total neglect of classroom instruction. Teachers may be absent from class with no structured forms of

education in the classroom. The second image displays the educational focus on the final exams. It is as if exams by themselves improve education. The school system is an exam-taking enterprise and is not based on the acquisition of skills or of certain life competencies. The public often evaluates schools based on their performance in the national exams. Therefore, teachers who can afford not to teach and who focus all their efforts on training students to answer exam questions are handsomely rewarded with praise and public confidence. The national obsession with exams is tantamount to the proverbial frequent weighing of a cow to increase its weight.

Another image is captioned: "Is classroom terror an effective method of instruction?" (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Is classroom terror an effective method of instruction? Image first published in Martínez (2017), ©Human Rights Watch, licenced under CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 US DEED.

The cartoon shows a large hand holding a large stick, poised to descend upon a hapless student. The image of the student is that of absolute terror. The student is shaking with fear, sweat flying from his body as he tries to write something. It is difficult to imagine that any learning can take place in this environment. Corporeal punishment as a hangover from the colonial system continues to plague the education system (Kalolo and Kapinga 2023). This is a symptom of an education system that does not put learning and the students at the centre of the education enterprise.

This cartoon is a caricature of what is happening in the schools and the classroom. It is a metonymic representation of bankrupt teaching methods and archaic education that focuses on the humiliation of the students and the use of terror, supposedly for negative reinforcement. However, the artist masterfully projects the futility of the approach, drawing sympathy from the reader, and shows how this use of terror contradicts all that is known about effective learning.

The images portray the horrible conditions of the education system in Tanzania. However, these are all symptoms. These are the things we observe, and we conclude that there is serious trouble in education. Tibasima also draws attention to other aspects of education that may appropriately be interpreted as causes of the dysfunction, to which we now turn.

### Representation of causes

Five cartoons represent Tibasima's portrayal of the causes of the dysfunction in Tanzanian education. The first one was discussed earlier, as a metonymy of the problem of student enrolment, signifying the bureaucratic addiction to large enrolment numbers without concern for the quality of education. Other issues include underinvestment in education, corruption that diverts resources from schools and teachers, unequal access to quality education, and

outdated curricula. These are illustrated in five images:

1. The decrepit truck
2. The airport scene
3. The computer refuses to give salaries
4. The teacher's challenge
5. No questions!

Each of these represents a particular theme or impediment to improving education.

One of the frequent themes in Tibasima's assessment of the education system in Tanzania is underinvestment. The situation is more serious for primary and secondary levels, where the percentage of the education budget has declined compared to higher education (Shyllon and Joshi 2015). School supplies are inadequate, many schools have no laboratories, and when they do have them, they have no equipment. Libraries have no books. Schools may lack even textbooks. In addition to all kinds of shortages, teachers are not well compensated, and work in harsh environments with little or no in-service training (Chonjo et al. 1996; Mhonyiwa et al. 2011). One image that captures this is a broken-down vehicle that metaphorically stands for the teaching profession and for teaching (Figure 9).

The truck, labelled *Ualimu* 'The Teaching Profession' on the body, with the luggage on top labelled *Elimu* 'Education', does not have wheels. The window of the driver's cabin is broken. Apparently, the engine is running, and the truck is vibrating, as the tortoise remarks. Nevertheless, this truck is going nowhere.

The truck is a metaphor in which the wheels are supposed to facilitate movement: the movement of education from one point or situation to another, presumably a more advanced state. The education system is riding on the teaching profession. However, the teaching profession (the decrepit truck) is not supported by the requisite investment. The lack of tyres is a metaphorical representation of the lack of resources required for the teachers to



Figure 9: Teaching: a broken-down profession. Image first published with the title, “Kobe Ualimu Bongo” on <http://marcotibasima.blogspot.com>, May 17, 2013. Used with permission.

move education and society into the future. Just as the truck is not useful for moving to the next place, it appears that the teaching profession in Tanzania is not equipped to prepare young people for a future with increasingly sophisticated technology. The noise from the engine is obviously the only activity the teachers and students are engaged in. The engine noise is a metaphor for some functions going on in the education system and for teachers doing something. But the teaching profession is metaphorically crippled, unable to move forward, just like the truck without wheels. As the clever commentator, Ka Kobe, remarks, “*Kuwaka linawaka. Lakini...*” “The engine can be turned on. But...” In other words, given this kind of education, the country is facing a very uncertain future.

While the artist decries poor investment as a cause of the problems in education, he also

recognizes social stratification as a significant negative force. Liberalization of the economy has facilitated the accumulation of wealth by a small section of the population (Shivji 2009; Nyirenda 2021). Those who have the means send their children abroad for a better education. Others send their children to private schools in Tanzania. Since the 1990s, the liberalization of education has resulted in the unprecedented expansion of the private education sector. Private schools generally perform better than government schools (HakiElimu 2014; Shyllon and Joshi 2015; Sumra 2018). However, the fees in those schools can be prohibitive. Poor people cannot afford such schools. This exacerbates the inequality in access to quality education. The airport scene in Figure 10 is a microcosm of the negative impacts of stratification on the country’s education system.



Figure 10: Airport scene. Image first published in HakiElimu (2005). Used with permission.

A fat, overindulged man is seeing off his children. He is depicted with the characteristic corpulence that represents wealth and social class (Olaniyan 2016). He is labelled *kigogo*, which means a rich person or someone in a position of power and privilege. He represents the elite. The children are boarding a plane to study abroad. Low-income children and a mother can only look through the glass window with bewilderment, as they have no access to such privileges as quality education abroad. Ka Kobe is with the poor people, thus identifying himself with the underprivileged. The man can go up to the plane to see his children off, while the poor children are left to watch through the window. This scene reflects the distinction in access to education. The poor children can only watch their peers from a distance as those from wealthy families jet off to distant places.

The cartoon includes a radio broadcast in the lobby where the poor people are located; it points to the hypocrisy of the elite, saying: “*Ndugu wananchi, kiwango chetu cha elimu*

*hapa nchini kinapanda na kunaridhisha sana!*” ‘Countryfolk, the quality of our education is improving tremendously.’ Meanwhile, the wealthy father tells his children “*Kapateni elimu inayostahili wanangu. Hapa Bongo ni miyeyusho.*” ‘Go get appropriate quality education. The education in Tanzania is sub-standard.’ The tortoise laughs derisively and sneeringly says, “*Eti kiwango bora cha elimu!*” ‘High-quality education!’

This cartoon represents the social stratification and hypocrisy of the elite. While they ostensibly proclaim the high standards of education in the country, they send their children abroad for better education. Even for parents who do not send their children abroad, there are now many quality private schools for which parents pay substantial fees. As long as the elite can afford quality education for their children, there will always be a suspicion that they do not care about the dismal conditions of the public school system. Unlike the Tanzanian education system between the 1960s and 1990s, when there was more equitable support for learning



in the country, in the present day, children of the rich and powerful rarely go to public schools. It is also very well known that many powerful people obtain their wealth through dubious means, including misappropriating public resources (Preventing and Combating of Corruption Bureau 2020). The net effect of these trends is that the government

underinvests in public education because it does not directly impact the children of those in power.

In addition to the underinvestment in the teaching profession and education in general, several factors exacerbate the disastrous situation. One of the more damaging ones is corruption, here depicted humorously in a cartoon showing a civil servant and a group of



Figure 11: The computer refuses to give salaries. Image first published in HakiElimu (2005). Used with permission.

new teachers he is supposed to serve (Figure 11).

New teachers (*walimu wapya*) in tattered clothes struggle with bureaucracy and are inquiring about their salaries. They are told by the official “*Majina yenu yamegoma kutosha kwenye kompyuta. Jaribuni mwezi ujao.*” ‘Your names could not fit into the computer. Try next month.’ The official is sitting on a pile of money that is designated as *mishahara* ‘salaries’. One of the teachers is thinking: “*Nauli tu ya kurudia nyumbani sina. Huo mwezi ujao itakuwaje?*” ‘I don’t even have a (bus) fare to

take me home. How can I make it through the month?’ Ka Kobe thinks “*Kompyuta imekuwa kisingizio.*” ‘The computer has become such a lame excuse.’

This cartoon represents the practices that oppress and exploit teachers and schools. Money meant for salaries and the upkeep of teachers is misappropriated by corrupt officials, represented by the man sitting on a pile of salary money. The new teachers are powerless, as the official provides a preposterous reason for not paying them: their names could not fit into the computer. The corruption

also extends to matters such as exam leakages, which Tibasima addresses in other comical images.

Another image is that of a confused teacher trying to figure out the content and methodology of a new science curriculum (Figure 12).

The picture shows a teacher (*mwaliimu*) at his desk with piles of paper; he is also sitting on books or paper. He is reading *Sayansi: Mtaala*

*Mpya* 'The New Science Curriculum'. He scratches his head and sweats profusely while trying hard to comprehend or figure out something. He thinks "Du! Hapa wamenichanganya kabisa, sijui nitafundisha vipi hii?" "They have confused me. I do not know how to teach this?" Ka Kobe is holding a poster that says, *Ushauri wa Dezo! Tumia ubunifu tu. Bora elimu.* 'Free advice. Use your imagination. (Who cares) provided there is some education.'



Figure 12: The teacher's challenges. Image first published in HakiElimu (2005). Used with permission.

This picture is a metonym of the major problem of inadequate preparation and professional development programmes. One would expect that there would be workshops and other professional development programmes to help teachers keep abreast of new developments whenever there are innovations in the curriculum. Nevertheless, that is not the case. Teachers are on their own and they must figure it out by themselves without help.

As noted earlier, concerns about learning and education are, essentially, concerns about the future. Education is supposed to equip young people with necessary skills for the future and increase their ability to develop themselves (Nyerere 2004). When they lack skills to improve their lives, there will be problems in producing basic necessities, creating competent leadership, interacting with other modern societies, and creating a better world. Without

stating it, Tibasima imagines a dystopian society in the future because he sees little or no evidence of steps that can truly remedy the current situation. In some cartoons, he invites the reader to imagine these futures. Consider Figure 13.

This is a cartoon of a classroom interaction between a history teacher and a student. The topic on the board is *Historia ya Ukoloni* 'A History of Colonialism'. One of the students is

asking, "Eti mwalimu, utandawazi ndio nini?" 'Sir, what is globalization?' The teacher, holding a history book, angrily responds, "Maswali yasiyohusu somo langu kaulize kwenu, ebo!" 'For all questions that have nothing to do with my subject, go home and ask.' One would think that history is precisely the subject where globalization should be discussed. The teacher's dismissive response to this question is baffling and suggests he does not know what

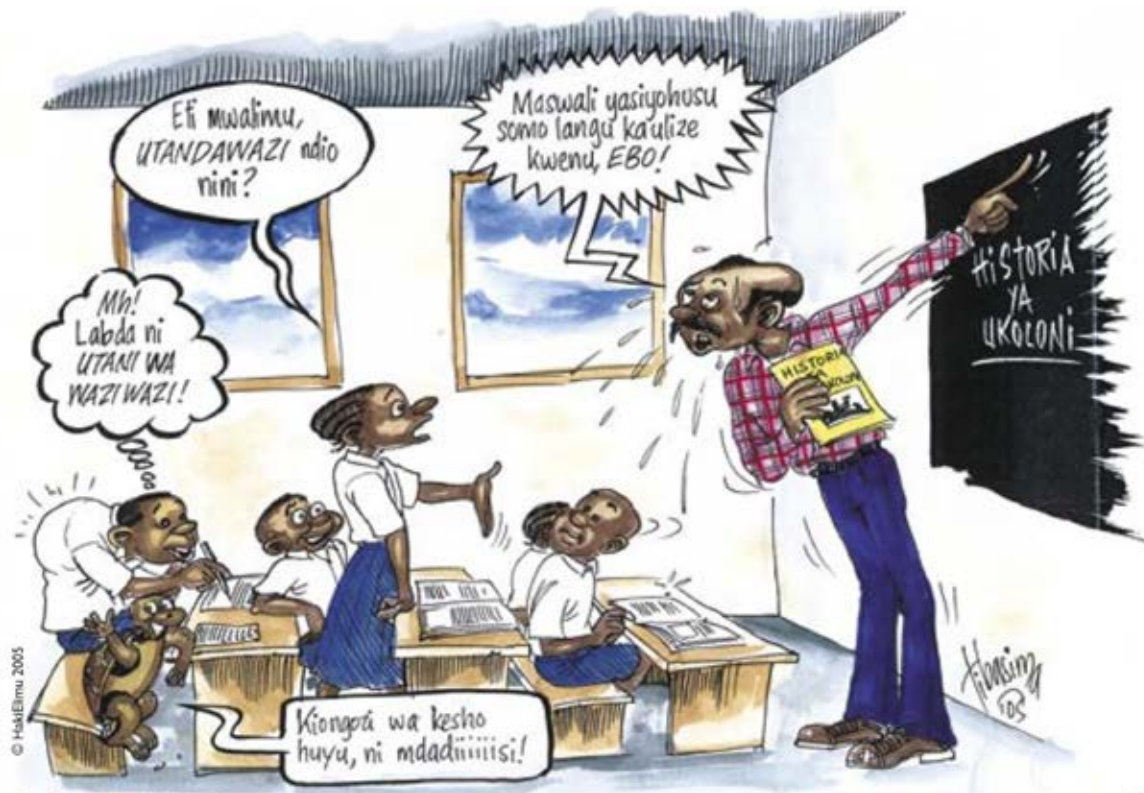


Figure 13: No questions! Image first published in HakiElimu (2005). Used with permission.

globalization is. The expression of bewilderment on the faces of two of the students near the girl asking the question captures the confusion. Ka Kobe's commentary reveals Tibasima's fear about the future. He says, "Kiongozi wa kesho huyu mdadiiisi!" "This future leader is very inquisitive."

Education must nurture curiosity and lead humanity to a better understanding of society and nature. The student's curiosity, however, is not satisfied. Instead of encouraging inquisitiveness, the teacher is stuck in a

narrowly defined syllabus and fails to address a very pertinent question. This goes against Nyerere's (2004) suggestion that education should arouse curiosity and questioning. Ka Kobe's comment ostensibly asks what kind of future leaders this education is producing? Without appropriate education, future leaders will not have the skills to analyze problems, create solutions, organize, and mobilize resources to achieve goals and solve problems. The cartoon is a metonymic representation of problems that stymie students' learning, such

as teachers' incompetence, and lead to a less-than-promising future.

In 1967, the first president of Tanzania articulated the goals of education for the new nation. He wrote that education must "encourage the development in each citizen of three things: an enquiring mind; an ability to learn from what others do, and reject or adapt it to his own needs; and a basic confidence in his own position as a free and equal member of the society, who values others and is valued by them for what he does and not for what he obtains" (Nyerere 1968, 53). Education in Tanzania today does not appear to be aiming towards or accomplishing, these goals. The teacher in this image is obviously not interested in developing an inquiring mind. This does not bode well for the future.

## Conclusion

This study explored how Tibasima's cartoons on education in Tanzania paint a picture of a disastrous education system. Since 2000, the education sector in Tanzania has experienced an unprecedented expansion. However, public education remains underfunded, with inadequate resources and outdated curricula, and

is woefully lacking in teacher training and professional development. Research by numerous educators have been sounding the alarms regarding this disastrous situation. There is a danger that the education system is not properly preparing the youth for the ever-changing world.

Tibasima draws thought-provoking images, articulately dissects the education system in Tanzania, and cleverly shines the metaphorical light on that which is ignored. The cartoons reveal that the artist thinks very deeply about the issues and is very concerned about the future of the country given the kind of education that is available to most children in Tanzania today. This paper has discussed only a few cartoons, but the repertoire of Tibasima's commentary on education includes such issues as the medium of instruction, the lack of programmes to develop reading skills, unequal access and mistreatment of girls in schools, the physical structures of schools, student loans, and the role of local politicians in education. A concern for the quality and effectiveness of education implies concern for the future, since education is preparation for future. Tibasima implicitly warns that, with such poor preparation, the future of Tanzanian society is bleak.

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