

Inaugural EAC Regional Education Conference Report

Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century: Collective Action for Quality, Inclusive, and Lifelong Learning in East Africa.

INTRODUCTION

August 12th -15th, 2024, marked a significant milestone for the East African Community Partner States as they convened for the Inaugural East African Community Regional Education Conference at the Arusha International Conference Centre (AICC) in Arusha, Tanzania. The conference, held under the theme “*Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century: Collective Action for Quality, Inclusive and Life-long Learning in East Africa,*” underscored the region's unwavering commitment to providing quality, inclusive, and life-long education. The conference provided a platform and an opportunity for partner states to reflect on, engage with, and re-imagine education provisions regionally.

Designed to foster collective participation and action among partner states, the conference brought together 512 delegates from the eight EAC Partner States and beyond, representing a rich tapestry of stakeholders. The 512 attendees were high-level policymakers and government officials, including Ministers, Principal Secretaries, Under Secretaries, Permanent Secretaries, and senior officials such as directors, commissioners, and curriculum officers. Additionally, parliamentarians, researchers, teachers, students, development partners, representatives from regional organizations, civil society organizations, and academic institutions were all well-represented, underscoring the inclusive nature of the event.

The inaugural event was a powerful demonstration of the impact of collaboration. The EAC, in partnership with key regional and international organizations, including the African Union (AU), the Regional Education Learning Initiative Africa (RELI-Africa), the Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the People’s Action for Learning Network (PAL Network), the Africa Curriculum Association (ACA), UNICEF, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Food for Education, Education.org, and the British Council, organized this landmark conference. Each organization brought a unique and valuable perspective, contributing to the collective goal of enhancing education across the East African region. The organizing partners committed to ensuring that this conference marks the beginning of an ongoing collaboration, with the goal of advancing educational reforms and promoting holistic learning for all children in the EAC.

This report presents a synthesis of the key evidence and emerging issues raised by the Conference presentations on values and life skills in Africa, as well as the key reflections and implications for educational policy and practice within the region.

Context, Objectives, and Themes of the Conference

In alignment with the AU's designation of 2024 as the "Year of Education," under the theme "Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century: Building Resilient Education Systems for Increased Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality, and Relevant Learning in Africa," the conference presented a timely opportunity to **advocate for the improvement of learning in the region**. The AU's theme emphasizes the need for member states to accelerate the achievement of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The conference thus served as a critical platform for the EAC to review progress, prioritize actions, and strategize for the future of education in the region. Rather than dwelling on challenges, the conference adopted a solutions-oriented approach, emphasizing the sharing of innovative practices and evidence-based strategies that have proven effective in the region. The overarching aim was to galvanize joint action and instill a sense of urgency in addressing low learning outcomes as a pressing social justice issue in East Africa.

The key objectives of the conference were to:

1. Facilitate dialogue and progressive discussions on building resilient education systems capable of catering to the diverse needs of learners and enhancing learning outcomes for all children in the EAC region.
2. Share and promote best practices for implementing evidence-based, innovative, feasible, and sustainable solutions for education transformation.
3. Establish a regional network and forum to strengthen multi-sectoral partnerships and collaboration for EAC education development.
4. Clarify and share strategies to ensure educational equity for all children, especially those furthest behind in the EAC region.
5. Develop concrete action plans to ensure the sustainability of the conference and its initiatives within the EAC.

The conference objectives were explored through nine distinct sub-themes, each led by a different partner organization:

1. Stronger and Resilient Education Systems – Led by the East African Community (EAC)
2. Effective Implementation of Competency-based Curricula – Led by the African Curriculum Association (ACA)
3. Strengthening Teacher Capacity for Foundational Learning (FL) and Secondary Education – Led by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)
4. Advancing 21st Century Competences for Each Child – Led by the Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE)
5. Data and Accountability for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.1.1 – Led by the People’s Action for Learning Network (PAL Network)
6. Children Furthest Behind – Led by the Regional Education Learning Initiative Africa (RELI-Africa)
7. Integration of EdTech in Education – Led by ADEA
8. Confronting the Language Question – Led by the EAC Kiswahili Commission
9. Regional Strategies for Youth Employability: Articulating Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD), and Innovation – Led by ADEA

Official Opening Session

The official opening session of the conference began with welcoming remarks from the Regional Commissioner for Arusha, Mr. Paul Makonda, who warmly received participants. He emphasized the region’s commitment to safety, especially during the peak tourism season, and invited delegates to explore nearby attractions such as Tarangire and Manyara National Parks, as well as the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. Acknowledging the significance of the conference in uniting education stakeholders, he expressed hope that it would provide an ideal environment for sharing experiences, successes, and solutions to challenges in education systems across East Africa and the continent. He concluded by extending a warm welcome to all attendees. [Read full remarks here.](#)

Speech 1: Remarks from the Chief Guest, H.E. Philip Isdor Mpango, Vice President, United Republic of Tanzania

H.E. Philip Isdor Mpango, Vice President, United Republic of Tanzania, speaking on behalf of H.E. the President Madam Samia Suluhu Hassan, welcomed participants to the East African Community (EAC) Education Conference in Arusha. He emphasized the significance of the conference in light of the African Union’s designation of 2024 as the Year of Education, aligning with the Dar es Salaam Human

Capital Declaration's commitments to investing in people. Acknowledging progress in harmonizing education systems within the EAC, he highlighted key achievements, such as regional quality assurance standards and mutual recognition of qualifications. However, he also pointed out persistent challenges, including access, teacher quality, financing, and the need for digitalization and integration of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence. He stressed that addressing these issues requires collaborative regional efforts.

Dr. Mpango underscored the urgency of increased investment in education, citing Africa's low Human Capital Index scores and the region's high fertility rates, which necessitate greater resources for education and healthcare. He outlined Tanzania's major education reforms, including extending compulsory schooling from seven to ten years by 2027/28, curriculum updates, and integrating vocational training into secondary education. These reforms aim to enhance access, improve quality, and align education with technological advancements and labor market demands. He also welcomed international support from partners like the EU, UNICEF, ADEA, RELI Africa among others, emphasizing the need for continued regional cooperation. In closing, he reaffirmed Tanzania's commitment to strengthening the EAC's education sector and officially declared the conference open. [Read full remarks here.](#)

Speech 2: Opening Remarks from H.E. Ms Veronica Nduva, Secretary General, East African Community

The EAC Secretary General, H.E Ms. Veronica Nduva, welcomed distinguished guests and delegates to the inaugural EAC Regional Education Conference in Arusha, emphasizing its significance in strengthening regional cooperation in education. She highlighted the conference as a long-awaited forum to bring together ministries, stakeholders, and development partners to chart the future of education. She noted that the event aligned with the African Union's declaration of 2024 as the Year of Education in Africa, reinforcing EAC's commitment to collaboration with the AU in education, science, and technology. Ms. Nduva stressed the critical role of education in socio-economic transformation and regional integration, citing Articles 102 and 103 of the EAC Treaty, which underscore Partner States' commitment to cooperative efforts in education and training.

She acknowledged progress made in harmonizing education systems, improving quality, and enhancing student mobility, including the declaration of EAC as a Common Higher Education Area. However, she also recognized challenges such as high dropout rates, children out of school, and foundational learning gaps and encouraged conference participants to generate actionable strategies to address these challenges. She urged stakeholders and development partners to unite in advancing education for societal transformation. Ms. Nduva expressed gratitude to key partners, including UNICEF, AU, ADEA, PAL Network, RELI, GIZ, and the EU, for their support. She concluded by appreciating the Tanzanian government for its hospitality and reaffirming EAC's commitment to making this conference a regular feature in the regional education agenda. [Read full remarks here.](#)

Speech 3: Welcoming the chief guest by the Hon. Prof. Adolf Mkenda, Minister of Education, United Republic of Tanzania

The Minister for Education, Science, and Technology Hon. Prof. Adolf Mkenda welcomed delegates to the EAC Education Conference 2024, emphasizing the collective commitment to advancing education in the region. He highlighted the role of education as the foundation of society, empowering individuals and fostering sustainable development. Acknowledging the diversity of cultures and ideas within the EAC, he stressed the importance of equipping youth with skills and knowledge to navigate an evolving world.

He noted key challenges facing the education sector, including equitable access to quality education, adapting to technological advancements, and promoting inclusive learning. The conference, he stated, provides a platform for sharing best practices, exploring innovative solutions, and fostering collaboration on curriculum development, technology integration, and critical thinking. To conclude, he expressed gratitude to all participants for their dedication and expressed confidence that the conference would drive a transformative change in the region's education systems. [Read full remarks here](#)

Speech 4: Goodwill message from H.E. Prof. Mohammed Belhocine, Commissioner, Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, African Union.

H.E. Prof. Mohammed Belhocine, Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation at the African Union, delivered opening remarks at the Inaugural East African Community (EAC) Regional Education Conference. He highlighted the significance of education in shaping Africa's future, aligning with the African Union's declaration of 2024 as the Year of Education. Recognizing progress in education, he also acknowledged persistent challenges such as disparities in access, financial constraints, conflict, and the impact of climate change. He called for a holistic, collaborative approach, urging governments, educators, civil society, and the private sector to work together in building resilient, inclusive, and future-ready education systems.

Prof. Belhocine stressed the need for investments in teacher training, curriculum relevance, technology integration, and the development of critical skills such as problem-solving and creativity. He advocated for harmonized policies to facilitate mobility under the African Continental Free Trade Area and emphasized the importance of promoting indigenous knowledge and Africa's historical narrative in education. He concluded by urging participants to forge partnerships, commit to action, and champion lifelong learning to empower Africa's youth as future leaders, innovators, and agents of change. [Read full remarks here.](#)

Speech 5: Goodwill message from Hon. Awut Deng Achuil, Chair SCESTCS & Minister for General Education & Instruction, South Sudan.

Hon. Awut Deng Achuil, Chair of the EAC Sectoral Council on Education, Science, Technology, Culture, and Sports (SCESTCS) and Minister for General Education & Instruction in South Sudan, welcomed participants to the Inaugural EAC Regional Education Conference. She acknowledged the efforts of EAC Secretary General Veronica Nduva and various partners in making the conference a reality, highlighting that the idea was first proposed during the 15th Sectoral Council Meeting. While the COVID-19 pandemic delayed its initial plans, it also served as a catalyst for transformation in education systems. The 19th Sectoral Council later approved moving forward with the conference, leading to its realization.

Hon. Achuil emphasized that the conference aligns with the African Union's designation of 2024 as the Year of Education and presents an opportunity to renew commitments to advancing education and training. She noted significant progress in the EAC region, including harmonization of education systems, mutual recognition agreements, and regional quality assurance programs. However, challenges such as access, equity, quality, and funding remain. She expressed hope that the conference would yield strategies to address these issues and thanked Tanzania for hosting, the EAC Secretariat for its leadership, and partners for their continued support. [Read full remarks here.](#)

Speech 6: Goodwill message from Mr Albert Nsengiyumva, Executive Secretary, ADEA.

Mr. Shem Bodo, delivering a goodwill message on behalf of ADEA's Executive Secretary, Albert Nsengiyumva, expressed gratitude to the Tanzanian government for hosting the inaugural EAC Regional Education Conference. He commended the EAC Secretariat and its Partner States for organizing the event, highlighting its alignment with Africa's vision for a high-quality education and training system that accelerates development. The conference, he noted, provided a platform for empowering people through knowledge and engagement. He emphasized that the conference theme aligned with the AU's 2024 Year of Education and ADEA's Strategic Plan (2024-2028), which focuses on improving foundational learning, integrating vocational training with secondary education, enhancing research and harmonization of higher education qualifications, and strengthening education system resilience through data utilization, EdTech, and inclusion. ADEA is committed to sharing its expertise in these areas and learning from other stakeholders.

ADEA collaborates with the African Union, RECs, and Partner States on initiatives such as the PEERS initiative, a five-year project addressing education and skills data challenges in 30 African countries, including Tanzania, Kenya, and Rwanda. Recognizing the impact of poor data on policy decisions, the project aims to strengthen countries' capacity to collect and use quality education data for informed policymaking. Currently, ADEA has a team engaging with Tanzanian education officials on this initiative. Additionally, through the PEERS initiative with Expertise France and EDUFI, ADEA is working with EAC and ECOWAS to enhance regional education cooperation between Africa and Europe, focusing on policy implementation, inclusivity, and digital transformation. ADEA urged the EAC Secretariat and Partner States to make this conference a regular event to foster ongoing collaboration and progress in education. Reaffirming its commitment to supporting such engagements, ADEA looks forward to meaningful discussions and actionable outcomes. [Read full speech here](#)

Speech 7: Goodwill message from Ms Elke Wisch - UNICEF Country Representative, Tanzania

Ms. Elke Wisch, UNICEF Country Representative in Tanzania, delivered a speech on behalf of the UNICEF Regional Director at the Inaugural EAC Regional Education Conference. She began by acknowledging the United Republic of Tanzania and key education partners for their role in making the conference possible. She emphasized the collective responsibility to ensure that every child in East Africa has access to quality education, highlighting notable progress in school enrollment and gender parity. However, she also pointed out persistent challenges, including the high number of out-of-school children, poverty learning, and inadequate education funding. Despite these challenges, she expressed optimism about the region's potential to transform its education systems.

To drive meaningful change, Ms. Wisch stressed the need to transition to competency-based curricula, invest in teacher development, and leverage technology to enhance learning. She underscored the importance of inclusive education, particularly for marginalized children, including those with disabilities and those in conflict-affected areas. Additionally, she called for stronger regional collaboration, resilient education systems, and improved data collection to guide policy decisions. In closing, she urged all stakeholders to take bold and decisive action, fostering partnerships to sustain educational transformation and achieve the shared vision of quality education for every child in the region. [Read full speech here](#)

Speech 8: Dr John Kalage, Chairperson, RELI Africa Board

Dr. John Kalage, Executive Director of HakiElimu and Chairperson of RELI Africa, delivered opening remarks at the Inaugural East African Community Regional Education Conference, emphasizing the

collaborative efforts that made the event possible. He highlighted RELI Africa's role as a peer-learning initiative uniting over seventy civil society organizations across Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda to enhance education outcomes. He acknowledged global and continental commitments to education, referencing the 2022 Transforming Education Summit and the African Union's 2024 theme on building resilient education systems.

Dr. Kalage stressed the urgency of making education systems more inclusive and responsive to the needs of all learners. He noted that while progress has been made in advancing education in East Africa, significant challenges remain. He also noted that the conference served as a platform to assess progress, identify challenges, and develop actionable strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa. He called for the establishment of a regional network to strengthen multisectoral partnerships, ensuring that every child enjoys their right to quality education. He concluded by urging collective action to transform education and secure a brighter future for all children in the region. [Read full speech here](#)

PEERS Workshop: The role of Coordination in Building Resilient Education Systems Within the framework of EAC Conference and the Africa Year of Education 2024

The PEERS workshop, held on 13th August 2024 during the EAC Regional Education Conference, was a closed session hosted by the European Union and attended by Education Ministers from EAC partner states. Chaired by Mr Pietro Romano, Education Advisor, European Commission, the session focused on enhancing coordination to build resilient education systems, specifically within the framework of the EAC Conference and Africa Year of Education 2024. Participants explored strategies for improving collaboration between the East Africa Community (EAC) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to advance quality, gender-responsive, inclusive, green, and digital education policies. Discussions underscored the critical role of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in facilitating regional dialogue and knowledge-sharing among member states. The group identified key challenges such as limited institutional capacity, inadequate funding for coordination, and fragmented approaches to education across multiple RECs. The session helped solidify the foundation for technical dialogue spaces that will address these challenges and create synergies between the two RECs, fostering peer learning and more cohesive education policies across the regions.

Additionally, the workshop emphasized the importance of leveraging evidence-based practices for the development of education policies. Participants highlighted the need for mutual learning between the EU, ECOWAS, and EAC, focusing on transferring best practices and tools to enhance education policy design and implementation. The establishment of knowledge functions within the RECs was recognized as a critical step to ensure that these communities are equipped to lead informed and impactful policy initiatives. The group discussions and subsequent restitutions identified actionable steps for refining regional education strategies, promoting regional policy dialogues, and enhancing the RECs' contributions to global education forums. These outcomes will guide future activities to increase the use of scientific evidence in education policymaking, further strengthening the resilience of education systems in both regions.

Informal Ministerial Session at the EAC Regional Education Conference: Reflecting on Conference Outcomes with EAC and Partners

EMERGING ISSUES FROM THE CONFERENCE CATEGORIZED BY THEMES

Sub-Theme 1: Stronger and Resilient Education Systems

The "Stronger and Resilient Education Systems" theme highlighted several key issues critical to developing a robust educational framework in the East African Community (EAC) region. The subtheme attracted many abstracts, 25 of which were accepted and included in the conference program. The abstracts emphasize the need for the region's resilient, inclusive, and adaptable education systems, particularly in climate change and socio-economic challenges. Key focus areas included strengthening leadership and governance to drive educational reforms, enhancing regional collaboration, and leveraging technology to support learning in emergencies. There was a strong emphasis on early childhood education and foundational learning as critical investments for human capital development. Additionally, the themes highlighted the importance of inclusivity, with efforts to address the needs of marginalized groups and ensure quality education for all, supported by assessment-informed practices and accountability measures.

Dr. John Mugo, the Executive Director for Zizi Afrique Foundation and the Principal Investigator for the ALIVE initiative, gave the keynote address that highlighted the immense responsibility of ensuring that education systems enable all children of Africa to learn and thrive, realizing their dreams.

A resilient education system was identified as one that requires strong political will, regional collaboration, an enabling policy framework, and adequate resources, including funding, infrastructure, and human capital. Additionally, it must be capable of addressing the complex challenges posed by global crises, such as political instability, climate change, and environmental preservation. The need for community and private sector engagement was also emphasized as essential to creating an education system that can withstand and adapt to these evolving challenges.

Capacity building emerged as a significant opportunity for strengthening education systems. The conference underscored the importance of investing in the skills and competencies of educators, administrators, and instructors to make education systems more adaptable and responsive to emerging issues. By enhancing the capabilities of those who deliver and manage education, systems can become more resilient and better equipped to handle disruptions, whether from technological advancements or socio-political changes. This approach also ensures that education systems remain relevant and effective in meeting the needs of diverse learners across the region.

One of the critical recommendations from the conference on this sub-theme was the strategic integration of technology into education systems. While integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) presents challenges, it also offers vast opportunities to improve access to education, particularly in crises. The effective use of technology can enhance the resilience of education systems by providing alternative means of delivering education when traditional methods are disrupted. To achieve this, it was recommended that governments and education stakeholders promote strategic collaboration and policy integration, ensuring that evidence-informed policies guide the use of technology. Additionally, there was a strong call for building climate-resilient education systems and adopting a gender-transformative approach to ensure inclusivity and equity in education across the EAC region.

Sub-Theme 2: Effective Implementation of Competence-Based Curriculum

Seventeen abstracts were accepted and included in the conference program for the Effective Implementation of the Competence-Based Curriculum subtheme. The abstracts broadly covered areas including enhancing teacher capacity through targeted professional development and motivation as a critical component for delivering quality education; Systemic change and collaborative partnerships, as essential components for scaling and adapting CBC in diverse contexts, including resource-constrained and post-conflict environments; Leveraging technology and innovative approaches as support systems; Strong school leadership to guide and manage the reform process and parental empowerment and engagement as a critical lever in improving learning outcomes and supporting CBC. Collectively, the abstracts called for a comprehensive approach to effectively implementing CBC that addresses teacher needs, systemic challenges, contextual adaptation, and the integration of technology and community involvement.

Key issues emerging from the different sessions highlight that the practical implementation of the competency-based curriculum (CBC) faces several challenges that must be addressed to realize its full potential. One significant issue is the readiness of teachers to adapt to this new approach, as many educators lack the necessary training and support to transition from traditional knowledge-based teaching to a competency-focused model. This shift requires a fundamental change in instructional methods, which can be difficult without adequate professional development and resources. Additionally, the implementation of CBC is hindered by underfunding, which affects the availability of essential resources such as textbooks, teaching materials, and infrastructure. These financial constraints can lead to inconsistent education quality across different regions, potentially exacerbating disparities.

To ensure the successful implementation of CBC, it is crucial to focus on comprehensive teacher development, equipping educators with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to deliver the curriculum effectively. This includes ongoing professional development, mentorship, and support systems tailored to the needs of teachers as they navigate this transition. Additionally, a strategic approach to resource allocation is needed, ensuring that all schools have access to the materials and infrastructure required to support CBC. Collaboration among stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, and communities, is essential to align the curriculum with local needs while maintaining its relevance to global standards. By addressing these challenges holistically, the CBC can foster learners with the competencies needed to succeed in today's complex and dynamic world.

Sub-Theme 3: Strengthening teacher capacity to deliver Foundational Learning (FL) and Secondary Education

The subtheme of strengthening teacher capacity to deliver EdTech and foundational learning was addressed through a series of 21 presentations. These presentations explored the crucial role of integrating technology into educational practices to enhance teacher effectiveness and learning outcomes. The presentations emphasized the need for robust professional development programs and supportive environments to facilitate effective EdTech use. Key topics also included equipping teachers with the necessary skills for utilizing emerging technologies, such as e-assessment tools and digital learning platforms. Challenges like ineffective technology deployment and ensuring accessibility in rural or under-resourced areas were also highlighted. Innovative approaches, including integrating technology with play-based learning and mother-tongue instruction, were discussed as ways to improve educational practices. Additionally, the importance of equity and inclusivity in EdTech initiatives was stressed to ensure that all students benefit from technological advancements.

Key issues emerging from the various sessions and discussions indicate that strengthening teachers' capacity to deliver foundational learning (FL) and secondary education is vital for enhancing educational outcomes across the East African region. Teachers play a critical role in implementing effective FL programs, and therefore, ongoing professional development tailored to modern, evidence-based pedagogical methods is essential. These training programs should focus on student-centered

learning and the mastery of foundational skills, ensuring that teachers are fully equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students. In particular, teachers in rural and underserved areas require additional support to ensure that they can provide high-quality education. This support should include access to essential resources such as textbooks, teaching materials, and continuous mentoring, all of which contribute to improved classroom delivery and better learning outcomes.

Addressing foundational literacy and numeracy challenges at primary and secondary levels necessitates early intervention strategies that identify and support students before they fall too far behind. Integrating diagnostic tools is crucial, enabling teachers to track student progress and adapt their instructional approaches accordingly. It is also imperative that the curriculum aligns with minimum proficiency standards in literacy and numeracy, promoting continuous assessment and targeted improvement throughout a student's educational journey. By aligning the curriculum and ensuring teachers have the tools and training necessary to deliver it effectively, educational systems can better support students in achieving the required competency levels.

Effective teacher training and support are also key in overcoming barriers to delivering both FL and secondary education. Policymakers must prioritize FL within the broader education system, advocating for increased investments and long-term commitments to teacher development. Supporting evidence-based research is essential to inform policy development and ensure that educational practices are responsive to the needs of both students and educators. Collaboration with academic institutions, government bodies, and development partners can provide the data and insights needed to craft adaptive education policies that are grounded in real-world evidence and experiences.

To address these challenges holistically, it is also important to identify and scale up innovative models of education that have proven successful in delivering FL and secondary education. Such models should be integrated into national education systems and adapted to local contexts. Partnerships between governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector are crucial for funding and implementing these innovative approaches. New and effective delivery models can be developed by fostering collaboration among education stakeholders, ensuring that both FL and secondary education are accessible and effective for all students, particularly those in marginalized or underserved communities.

Sub-Theme 4: Advancing 21st Century Skills for Each Child

This subtheme was extensively covered through 34 presentations, a keynote address by Dr. Grace Baguma (the Executive Director for the Uganda National Curriculum Development Centre), and a round table discussion with six curriculum experts from across the regions. These papers and sessions provided a comprehensive view of how advancing 21st-century competencies involves a multifaceted approach, including teacher training, innovative pedagogical/classroom practices, community involvement, and contextual adaptation. These discussions highlighted the importance of equipping teachers with the skills necessary to foster digital literacy and integrate 21st-century skills into their teaching practices. The presentations emphasized a balanced approach to education that incorporates holistic and lifelong learning, focusing on socio-emotional skills, critical thinking, self-development, and academic achievements. Innovative educational methods, such as project-based learning and entrepreneurial education, were showcased as effective strategies for nurturing relevant skills. Additionally, community and family engagement was presented as essential for supporting educational outcomes and bridging gaps between schools and homes. Regional adaptation and contextualization of these competencies were also explored, providing insights into how different East African contexts address and implement these skills.

With the region poised to hold the largest labor market by 2050, the conference reiterated the fact that advancing 21st-century competencies for each child is crucial for addressing the demographic, economic, and social challenges in East Africa. The current educational landscape, however, shows low

levels of competency and proficiency in these areas, indicating a need for significant reform. Ensuring that students are prepared for the demands of a modern economy requires focusing on these competencies and integrating life skills that are relevant and applicable within the local socio-cultural context.

Both the round table discussions and the keynote address reiterated the fact that, life skills education must be contextualized to reflect the realities of students' environments. In East Africa, where socio-cultural conditions are similar across countries, there is an opportunity to share tools and approaches that address common educational challenges. However, the successful teaching of life skills depends on teachers' ability to adopt new methods and shift their pedagogical beliefs. The teachability of life skills and practical assessment methods like scenarios and hands-on tasks will allow educators to evaluate students' competencies in real-life applications. This approach empowers students, particularly girls, by equipping them with critical life skills that promote gender equality and enable them to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

Key recommendations for advancing 21st-century competencies include restructuring teacher training programs to focus on life skills and value education and investing in continuous professional development that emphasizes competency-based education, social-emotional learning (SEL), and the use of technology. Additionally, integrating SEL and life skills into curricula is essential for preparing students for future challenges, with a particular emphasis on cultural and contextual relevance. Innovative assessment tools must be developed to measure 21st-century skills effectively, ensuring that these assessments guide policy, curriculum, and teaching practices toward fostering a dynamic, student-centered learning environment.

Sub-Theme 5: Data and Accountability for SDG4.1.1

The subtheme of Data and Accountability for SDG 4.1.1 was examined through 13 abstracts and a round table discussion with six experts and technical persons on data and accountability. The People's Action for Learning Network and ADEA organized and facilitated the subtheme with a round table discussion emphasizing how robust data systems and accountability frameworks are crucial for advancing educational quality and equity in line with SDG 4.1.1. Key discussions centered on developing comprehensive data management frameworks to address learning gaps and improve educational progress in East Africa. Presentations explored integrating citizen-generated data with government data to strengthen education planning and policy. Emphasis was placed on the need for contextually relevant evidence to inform practices, focusing on foundational learning research in Sub-Saharan Africa. The role of data in driving accountability, policy change, and equitable access to education was highlighted, including the development of assessment tools and the integration of civic education into curricula. Additionally, the importance of data in fostering parental engagement to support quality, inclusive education was underscored.

Emerging issues from this sub-theme highlight the critical role of data in advancing educational outcomes. There are, however, several gaps that must be addressed in data collection practices. Current data collection practices lack inclusivity, often overemphasizing exam results rather than standards, and there is insufficient attention to assessing affective and psychomotor domains essential for holistic education. A significant gap in the availability of data and evidence, especially regarding the effectiveness of Early Childhood Education (ECE), foundational learning (FL) achievements, and socio-emotional learning (SEL) skills, persists, hindering advocacy efforts for and securing targeted investments in these essential areas.

The conference emphasized data management and governance as vital to advancing education through informed, data-driven decision-making. Education systems can implement more effective and inclusive policies by building robust data capacities at national and regional levels and fostering collaborative

partnerships. Developing digital tools to support school leaders in making evidence-based decisions is crucial, as well as addressing current gaps and improving data collection is paramount. Additionally, strengthening citizen-generated data initiatives and improving the capacity of school management committees is critical to enhancing transparency and accountability in education within the region. Increased funding for foundational learning research, particularly from local sources, and regional collaboration to improve data comparability are crucial for addressing educational disparities. At the same time, implementing robust frameworks to measure and monitor early childhood development outcomes will help identify equity gaps and inform targeted interventions.

Sub-Theme 6: Children Furthest Behind

Twenty abstracts were accepted for the subtheme of Children Furthest Behind. The subtheme was led by RELI -Africa and Collective Leadership Rising Institute founder and Executive Director Dr. Joyce Malombe gave the keynote address. The presentations highlighted innovative approaches to reintegrating out-of-school children through Accelerated Education Programs and targeted interventions for pregnant girls and young mothers, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts. Local and inclusive practices were discussed as crucial for reaching children in remote areas, focusing on integrating technology and community-driven solutions. Gender equality was a significant theme, with strategies proposed to enhance investment in girls' education and support gender-specific needs. Creative and contextual learning models, such as the Child-Centric Ecological Teaching and Learning Model (CCETLM), effectively addressed educational challenges. Additionally, the role of data in informing decision-making and the barriers posed by policy impediments were explored, underscoring the need for evidence-based approaches to close educational gaps.

Emphasis was placed on the multifaceted challenges and necessary actions to ensure every child receives a quality education, especially those most marginalized. A significant challenge however, is the lack of data on the number and specific needs of children who are left behind, such as those with disabilities, children in rural or remote areas, and those in conflict zones. Creating and implementing effective policies and tools to address these barriers is difficult without comprehensive data. Additionally, inclusive education remains a significant challenge, with many children still not achieving minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics despite increased enrollment rates. Wealth disparities and unequal access to resources exacerbate these educational inequalities.

Several recommendations were generated to address these issues, focusing on enhancing policy implementation, improving data use, and fostering collaboration. Governments were encouraged to develop and enforce inclusive legislative frameworks that prioritize the educational rights of marginalized children and expand national education financing to ensure equal access to quality education, particularly during crises. practices can be optimized, and resources can be allocated more effectively.

Collaboration and partnerships between governments, NGOs, communities, and educational institutions were seen as a lever for maximizing the impact of educational interventions. The conference also noted that implementing gender-responsive pedagogies and supporting re-entry for pregnant girls and young mothers can also help reduce educational disparities. Tailored interventions should focus on hard-to-reach and marginalized children, providing necessary support like school feeding programs, safe learning environments, and implementation of inclusive practices that ensure the learning needs of all children are adequately met. By focusing on these areas, education systems can better support all children, particularly those who face the most significant barriers to accessing quality education.

Sub-Theme 7: Integration of EdTech in Education

Five papers were presented on the sub-theme of integrating EdTech in education. The papers explored various aspects of how technology can enhance vocational education and 21st-century skills development. These included building digital skills through a regional network, using ICT to improve

math education in Tanzania, designing EdTech for marginalized learners, promoting the sustainable use of mobile learning tools in Kenyan schools, and empowering teachers with tablets in Tanzania. These papers demonstrated how EdTech can support skill-building and inclusivity in education.

The conference affirmed that integrating EdTech in education is a key strategy for enhancing learning outcomes and building more resilient education systems. EdTech holds significant promise for making education more engaging and efficient, mainly by improving literacy and numeracy in early education levels (P1-P3). It offers valuable tools for reaching children in areas with limited access to traditional educational resources, such as displaced and refugee populations. These technologies have the potential to bridge gaps in educational access and quality, making learning more accessible and tailored to diverse needs.

However, several challenges were identified to impede the effective implementation of EdTech. Poor infrastructure, limited ICT equipment, and inadequate internet connectivity are major barriers, particularly in public schools. Additionally, the cost of digital tools and the insufficient digital skills among teachers further constrain the adoption of EdTech. The frequent transfer of teachers also disrupts continuity in using these technologies. To address these issues, there is a pressing need for enhanced partnerships and collaborations to scale up EdTech initiatives, especially in regions with high numbers of displaced children.

Several key recommendations have been proposed to overcome these challenges. Establishing a Regional Network for Digital Skills and Innovation can facilitate the sharing of best practices and foster multi-sectoral partnerships across East Africa. This network should focus on advancing digital skills, conducting research, and promoting innovation in education. Additionally, ongoing digital literacy training for teachers is essential to ensure they can effectively incorporate ICT into their teaching methods. Providing practical, hands-on training and encouraging the use of various digital tools can enhance teaching effectiveness.

Infrastructure improvements are also crucial. Investing in educational technology infrastructure will support the integration of digital tools in classrooms while addressing teacher-student ratios will help optimize the use of these technologies. Reducing overcrowded classrooms by hiring more teachers will allow for more personalized instruction and better implementation of EdTech resources. By addressing these recommendations, education systems can better leverage EdTech to enhance learning outcomes and create more equitable and effective educational environments.

Sub-Theme 8: Confronting the Language Question

The 11 abstracts under Sub-Theme 8, "Confronting the Language Question," collectively explore the complex role of language in education across East Africa. They highlight key challenges and opportunities in implementing effective language of instruction policies, promoting literacy, and improving learning outcomes. Topics range from innovative methodologies and approaches to teaching in familiar and formal languages to addressing the impact of language on girls' education in traditional communities and post-conflict areas. Other abstracts also examined the progress and challenges of transitioning between languages of instruction, particularly in countries like Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Somalia, while emphasizing the importance of creating adaptable, modern language policies that support foundational literacy, numeracy, and youth empowerment.

The subtheme was also examined through a round table discussion and a keynote address delivered by Dr. Prosperous Nakindu from Kyambogo University, Kampala, who noted that integrating multilingualism into educational systems remains complex and nuanced, particularly in regions where colonial languages have historically held prominence. From the different sessions and papers that addressed the subtheme, the conference noted a pressing need to shift attitudes towards multilingualism in Africa and better recognize and integrate local languages within the education system. Colonial languages, while valuable for broader communication and access to global resources, should not

overshadow the significance of mother tongues. Discussions often center on defining what constitutes a mother language and determining how it should be prioritized within educational frameworks to ensure that all students can engage meaningfully with their learning.

The Global Education Monitoring Report underscores the importance of teaching children in their home languages, particularly for those in remote or marginalized areas. This approach is seen as crucial for equity and justice, helping to ensure that students are not left behind. However, implementing this practice presents challenges, such as teaching complex subjects like mathematics in local languages due to a lack of appropriate materials. Additionally, teachers, who are frequently not from the local communities, often struggle with delivering content in the local languages, exacerbating the problem of inadequate teaching resources and preparation.

To address these challenges, several key recommendations are proposed. Firstly, language policies should be grounded in research and stakeholder input to ensure they are evidence-based and effectively monitored. Developing a comprehensive language policy framework is essential, particularly for early-grade literacy. This policy should align curriculum, textbooks, pedagogy, and assessments with bilingual or multilingual approaches. It is also important to establish a scientifically backed curriculum that supports literacy instruction in African languages and ensures smooth transitions between languages to prevent disruptions in learning.

Furthermore, teacher education and resource development must be enhanced to support multilingual education. This includes addressing teacher shortages and developing high-quality teaching materials compatible with regional languages. Providing targeted training for teachers and ensuring that educational resources align with the students' linguistic context will help bridge the gap between policy and practice. By focusing on these recommendations, educational systems can better support multilingual education, ensuring that all students receive equitable and effective instruction in their language of preference.

Sub-Theme 9: Regional Strategies for Youth Employability: Articulating Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD), and Innovation

Sub-Theme 9, "Regional Strategies for Youth Employability: Articulating Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET), Technical and Vocational Secondary Education (TVSD), and Innovation," was addressed through 11 abstracts and a round table discussion that focused on various strategies to enhance youth employability in East Africa. These abstracts explore themes such as fostering academia-industry partnerships to improve graduate employability, linking vocational skills training to the workplace, higher education reform to address the global skills gap and improve youth employment outcomes, and addressing socio-cultural barriers to women's participation in TVET. Several papers emphasize the role of strategic collaborations, inclusivity, and mobility in elevating TVET quality. Key areas of innovation include developing a regional TVET qualifications framework, integrating financial education into national curricula, and exploring models like the Hexa-helix for optimizing entrepreneurship skills training. Entrepreneurship was also highlighted as a pathway to youth empowerment in various contexts, including protracted refugee situations.

The conference observed that Integrating Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD) is vital for enhancing youth employability in the modern economy. A key observation was that many youths face difficulties transitioning across educational stages, leading to high dropout rates and underscoring the need for TVET programs that address 21st-century skills. Ensuring that TVET courses are accredited and recognized at national, regional, and global levels is essential to boost the employability of graduates. Accreditation validates the quality of education and increases the acceptability of qualifications across borders, enhancing job prospects for TVET graduates.

Public-private partnerships (PPP) are crucial in improving the relevance of TVET programs and enhancing youth employability. Collaborations between the public and private sectors can bridge the gap between the skills taught and the skills needed in the workforce. These partnerships can lead to more relevant training programs, better alignment with industry needs, and improved job placement opportunities. In addition to partnerships, there is a significant need for enhanced instructor training and development. In regions such as South Sudan, many TVET instructors lack formal qualifications, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive training programs that include conflict-sensitive pedagogy and inclusive education practices.

Investing in digital skills and green technologies to align TVET programs with the demands of the 21st-century job market is a crucial component. These investments ensure that graduates are prepared for modern economic challenges and can adapt to evolving industry requirements. Key recommendations include enhancing curriculum quality through academia-industry partnerships, developing regional qualifications frameworks, and focusing on the inclusion of marginalized groups. Additionally, supporting youth employment and entrepreneurship through continuous apprenticeships, seed grants, and skills development programs is vital. Addressing socio-cultural barriers, such as those hindering women's participation in TVET, is also crucial. Implementing gender-responsive training and restructuring curricula to combat bias will promote greater inclusivity and balance within the TVET sector. By addressing these areas, the TVET and TVSD systems can better align with current and future workforce needs, ultimately improving youth employability and contributing to economic growth.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS FROM THE CONFERENCE

A regional platform on education was established with critical actors from the region and beyond

One of the critical successes of the conference is the fact that the organizing committee comprised of the EAC secretariat, networks of civil society organizations (RELI, PAL Network, ALIVE), Regional Organizations (African Union, Africa Curriculum Association), Development Partners (ADEA, UNICEF, Bill and Melinda Gates, GIZ) and several local and international organizations including Education.org, Population Council, Girl Centre, Food for Education, APHRC, British council and Hakielimu among others committed to a bi-yearly meeting that brings together education actors on the same platform to discuss how to improve education in the region.

The EAC Conference successfully established a robust regional platform for advocacy and collaboration in education. This platform, spearheaded by the EAC Secretariat, included a wide array of stakeholders such as networks of civil society organizations (RELI, PAL Network, ALIVE), regional bodies like the African Union and the Africa Curriculum Association, and development partners including ADEA, UNICEF, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and GIZ. Local and international organizations like Education.org, Population Council, Girl Centre, Food for Education, APHRC, British Council, and Hakielimu boarded the coalition, further reinforcing the platform's comprehensive and inclusive nature. This coalition's commitment to regular, bi-yearly meetings is a testament to the collective will to address educational challenges collaboratively, ensuring that all voices—from grassroots organizations to international partners—are heard.

This regional platform serves as a forum for discussing educational improvements and a mechanism for sustained advocacy and action. By creating a consistent dialogue and shared decision-making space, the conference has laid the groundwork for ongoing collaboration, enabling the region to tackle common challenges and leverage shared educational opportunities. This approach ensures that policy developments are informed by a broad spectrum of perspectives and expertise, ultimately leading to more effective and contextually relevant educational reforms across the East African Community.

Relationship with government strengthened.

The East African Community (EAC) Conference marked a transformative moment in the relationship between the government and education actors. The conference began with an inaugural address by the Vice President of the Republic of Tanzania, who emphasized that East Africa's youthful population presents a significant opportunity for economic growth, innovation, and social progress. Still, this potential can only be unlocked through substantial investment in education. Dr. Philip Isdor Mpango, Vice-President of Tanzania, and other regional leaders, emphasized that harnessing the region's human capital is key to benefiting from the "Demographic Dividend." With Africa having the highest global return on education, where each additional year of schooling can boost youth earnings by up to 14%, the focus on education is crucial for driving the region's future development.

This opening speech was more than ceremonial; it was a strategic call to action, dialogue, and responsive policy-making that framed the government as a proactive and open partner in shaping an education system tailored for the 21st-century learner. The conference was marked by active and meaningful engagement between the government and education stakeholders. Panel discussions involving government representatives focused on critical topics such as implementing competency-based curricula, assessing 21st-century skills, data-driven accountability, and language considerations, enabling government representatives to present their strategies and listen to stakeholder concerns. A significant outcome of the conference was the establishment of country-level structures to ensure effective follow-up on commitments made during the event. This collaborative approach reinforced the government's leadership role in building solid and resilient education systems, fostering a shift towards a more responsive and inclusive education policy framework. The conference's conclusion, marked by a joint communique, underscored the unified commitment to advancing education systems that are fit for the future.

Deepened and extended local expertise

The EAC Conference played a pivotal role in deepening and strengthening local expertise across the East African region by creating opportunities for knowledge exchange, capacity building, and collaboration among regional education professionals and stakeholders. By bringing together a diverse array of local experts, educators, policymakers, and civil society organizations, the conference fostered an environment where local expertise was showcased and enhanced through interaction with regional and international partners. Throughout the conference, panels and workshops focused on critical issues such as the effective implementation of competency-based curricula, the assessment of 21st-century skills, and data for accountability in education. These sessions provided local experts with platforms to share their experiences, challenges, and innovations while gaining insights from peers across the region. These collaborative discussions helped build a collective understanding of best practices and context-specific solutions, reinforcing local capacities to address educational challenges.

LESSONS LEARNT AND WAY FORWARD

The conference program committee shared an evaluation template with all participants at the end to seek their feedback on the overall organization and management of the conference. We received responses from 77 participants, who provided us with information highlighting key areas that the conference committee will focus on to improve for subsequent conferences. These include the following:

Session Management and Program Structure: Participants' feedback indicated the need to improve session management and the overall program structure to enhance the effectiveness and impact of future conferences. A key recommendation was to limit the number of parallel sessions and allocate more time for each session to enable in-depth discussions, quality presentations, better attendance, and engagement, allowing participants to focus on fewer, more meaningful discussions. This will enhance the quality of interactions and ensure that the insights gained are more impactful. Focusing on depth rather than breadth presents opportunities for more in-depth discussions and a greater exchange of ideas, ultimately enriching the conference experience for all attendees. Additionally, strict adherence to the schedule should be ensured to prevent delays and disruptions. In addition, participants highlighted the need to release the conference program well in advance, providing a clear, coherent schedule, including sufficient transition time between sessions to facilitate smooth movement and avoid confusion. An aspect of a pre-registration system for sessions was raised as a means to support better management of session attendance.

Conference Duration and Planning: The recommendations emerging from analyzing participants' feedback indicate a need to enhance the conference's structure and organization to create a more organized, focused, and engaging experience, maximizing the value for all participants. The following issues were emphasized;

- **Extend Conference Duration:** Lengthening the conference to 5-6 days is recommended for deeper discussions, more focused sessions, and reduced scheduling conflicts. This extension would give participants more time to delve into complex topics, engage in meaningful exchanges, and foster stronger connections among attendees.
- **Advance Planning and Communication:** It is also recommended that the agenda be finalized well in advance and that presentations be shared before the conference. This approach would give participants ample time to prepare, leading to more informed and productive discussions. Early communication of the agenda and materials would allow attendees to manage their schedules better, ensuring fuller participation and reducing the likelihood of overlapping sessions.
- **Explore the option of a hybrid conference format that allows for virtual participation.** This will make the conference more accessible to those unable to attend in person.

Participant Engagement and Inclusivity

Enhancing the engagement of government officials and youth presenters is crucial for fostering more diverse and representative discussions. Increasing their participation ensures that a wide range of perspectives, especially those directly affected by educational policies, are included in the dialogue. Furthermore, accommodating special delegates from various institutions, including NGOs and regions with unique educational contexts like Zanzibar, is essential for promoting inclusivity. This approach ensures that the discussions reflect the diverse needs and challenges across different educational environments, leading to more comprehensive and equitable outcomes.

Venue and Logistics: Participants' feedback emphasized that the conference venue selection should consider their diverse needs. Proper lighting, reliable Wi-Fi, photography, and comfortable facilities were stressed as key to creating an environment conducive to learning and interaction. Additionally, organizing the schedule to allow ample time for networking and visiting exhibition booths is essential for fostering connections and the exchange of ideas among participants.

Create Opportunities for Networking and Collaboration among Participants: Equally important is creating opportunities for collaboration among different organizations and stakeholders. By facilitating coordination and aligning efforts, these collaborations can drive more unified and impactful educational outcomes, leveraging the strengths and resources of various groups to achieve shared goals.

Increase diverse participation on panels and round table discussions: Increase the involvement of government officials and educational leaders in discussions and subgroup sessions. Ensure representation from specific regions with unique educational systems, such as Zanzibar. Additionally, it encourages greater participation from younger attendees and ensures a diverse range of presenters. This will bring fresh perspectives and a broader range of viewpoints.

Concrete Actions and Progress Reports: Shift the focus towards actionable outcomes and concrete solutions. Emphasize the need for progress reports and accountability from stakeholders to ensure the conference leads to meaningful results.

Media and Social Media Engagement: The conference generated significant media and social media engagement, aimed at raising awareness, emphasizing the importance of education, and facilitating meaningful interactions among key stakeholders. To drive visibility and engagement, several hashtags were used. These were: #EACEducationConference, #EducationForAll, #EACREC2024, and #AUYearofEducation.

The social media engagement was strategically crafted with clear, impactful messages and interactive content that resonated with diverse audiences. Real-time updates, live sessions, and engaging discussions encouraged active participation, helping to extend the conference’s reach beyond physical boundaries. The consistent use of branded hashtags and social media handles enabled seamless tracking of interactions and contributed to the event’s cohesive online presence.

Overall, the media and social media efforts played a pivotal role in spotlighting the importance of quality education in East Africa, while fostering dynamic online conversations among participants, partners, and stakeholders.

Some of the recurring key messages from the analytics revolved around:

Education as a fundamental human right essential for socio-economic development.		
A call to address pressing education challenges in East Africa.	The importance of collective action and collaboration in transforming education systems.	A need to focus on quality, inclusive, and lifelong learning for all children.
The commemoration African Union's Year of Education 2024.		

APPENDIX I: Key observations and Recommendations from the conference

APPENDIX II: Conference Communique

APPENDIX III: Commitments from Organizing Partners.

APPENDIX VI: CONFERENCE ORGANISING COMMITTEE

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