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Children's Fiction as a Tool for Instruction: A Case of Barbara Kimenye's Moses Series

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Abstract

Over the years, Uganda has witnessed a decline in the quality of education in schools. The problems range from the mode of instruction and community involvement to laxity and poor inspection from quality assurance and standards officers from the Ministry of Education and Sports. Using the pedagogical/instruction flaws in Mr Mukibi's fictional school as a starting point for reflection, this article explores how Barbara Kimenye's Moses Series can be utilized as a tool to improve the quality of education in Ugandan schools. I focus on three major pedagogical flaws as depicted in the series: Failure to make the formal curriculum attractive to students; the ill-guided focus on discipline as the primary goal of education; and the poor supervision of schools by the Ministry of Education and Sports. The argument I advance in the paper is that there are many lessons that teachers, school administrators and government officials in charge of education can learn from the Moses series to help them improve the quality of education in the country. Data for the article was collected through a close reading of selected storybooks in the Moses series (*Moses* and *Moses in Trouble*) and a review of relevant secondary materials. Data analysis involved identifying the themes that emerged from the data collected regarding the pedagogical flaws depicted in the primary texts (*Moses* and *Moses in Trouble*).

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Introduction

G. Stanley Hall defines pedagogy as the art of teaching (1905, 375), that is, how to transmit knowledge "by the most economic and effective means from those older and wiser to those younger and more ignorant" (1905, 396). One might wonder why I am quoting from an article published in 1905 to begin my reflection on pedagogical flaws 120 years later. This is because the word pedagogy is often taken for granted to the extent that even books that have it in their titles, like Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Pedagogy of Hope,* and *Pedagogy of the Heart*, do not bother to define it. Tim Loreman defines it in a manner similar to Hall: "the employment of methods of teaching and learning that are directed towards an end goal as part of a broader education" (2011, 9). To Geoffrey Hinchliffe, this goal is "developing the well-formed person" (2001, 32) with abilities like "critical awareness, creativity [and] imaginative response" (2001, 33). In this article, I argue that there are several lessons on pedagogy that we can learn from Kimenye's Moses series if we reflect on the teaching flaws we see in the books. My focus is on the first two books in the series, *Moses* (1967) and *Moses in Trouble* (1968), because these represent the plot, drama and style of the other nine –

Moses and Mildred (1967), *Moses and the Kidnappers* (1968), *Moses in a Muddle* (1970), *Moses and the Ghost* (1971), *Moses on the Move* (1972), *Moses and the Penpal* (1973), *Moses the Camper* (1973), *Moses and the Raffle* (1986), and *Moses and the School Farm* (1987). Indeed, as Nancy J. Schmidt observes, all these storybooks have a lot in common: They "include many details of school life and curriculum" (1976, 74) and the adventures typically associated with cheeky schoolboys, for instance,

> They apprehend thieves in their headmaster's house [*Moses*], chase jewellery robbers [in *Moses and the Camper*] and capture a ghost (in *Moses and the Ghost*). When they are dissatisfied with the meals at their school, they mail some roaches they found in their food to the Minister of Education (in *Moses in Trouble*), and when they lose a pet snake in a teacher's bedroom, they lie to her to entice her out of the room (in *Moses and Mildred*). (Schmidt, 1976, 77)

While it is true that "very little of the educational functions of the school enters into the stories [since their] action usually focuses on dormitory life and extracurricular activities rather than on classroom activities" (Schmidt, 1976, 77), I demonstrate that we can infer what happens inside the classroom from what we learn about the teachers. In offering these reflections on the pedagogical flaws as depicted in the Moses series, I am guided by the view that fiction is a medium through which a society can re-examine itself with the aim of discovering where it has gone wrong in order to return to the right path, hence Chinua Achebe's contention that a novelist is a teacher who "cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must done" (1976, 59). The writer goes about this re-education by performing the miracle of transforming the readers "into active participants in a powerful drama of the imagination in which [the problem or crisis being portrayed in the text] takes on flesh and blood" (Achebe, 2012, 144), thereby making the story speak to the reader's experience. In this article, I argue that looking at the state of things at Mr Mukibi's school (its dilapidated buildings, overcrowded classrooms, nervous teachers and authoritarian school administrators) can help us explain why quality education remains a challenge in Uganda. In fact, the very existence of private schools – 41.7 per cent primary and 66 per cent secondary (Andebo, 2025, 209) – suggests that there is something the matter with the public secondary school system in the country: It is not able to absorb all the children in the country or "special children" like Moses and Sebastian who are expelled from one school to another because of indiscipline.

Theoretical Framework

According to Howard Becker (cited in Carlin, 2010, 218-219), "[w]orks of fiction, novels and stories, have often served as vehicles of social analysis" in the sense that they embody "complex descriptions of social life and its constituent processes". In this article, I focus on how the Moses series serves as a vehicle for the analysis of instruction in the fictional school where Kimenye sets her Moses adventure stories. My reflection on how the series can improve instruction in schools draws from the work of Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Luigi Giussani. Freire's work on education emphasizes at least three cardinal points. First, that education should be dialogic in nature with the teacher and the students becoming partners in learning, thereby leading to the teacher being "no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (2005, 80). Second, this dialogic

approach to education ensures that teaching is not reduced to the banking model where the teacher gives while the students receive the way a customer deposits money into a bank account to withdraw it later. Freire explains this model in detail thus:

> a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught; (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about; (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly; (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined; (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply; (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher; (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it; (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students; (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (2005, 73).

This model reduces students to passive recipients of the teacher's word and world, yet the purpose of education is to equip learners with the tools to enable them to speak their own word and interpret their world so that they become protagonists in the drama of their lives. This is what makes it possible for education to humanize and become an experience of freedom – the third cardinal point of Freire's teaching. In this article, I argue that the iron hand that the teachers use to beat the students into obeying authority goes against the dialogic method that Freire proposes as it robs the learners of the opportunity to explain their points of view. I also argue that the teachers' insistence that the students obey authority without question is a version of the banking model of education since it does not give the students the opportunity to reason with them their side of the story.

The work of bell hooks is relevant to the analysis I provide in this article. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), one of the most pertinent observations she makes is that there is a crisis in education in the sense that "[s]tudents often do not want to learn and teachers do not want to teach" (1994, 12). This is true of what happens in the Moses series: The teachers seem to care more about disciplining the students into obedience than teaching specific subjects and life lessons, while the students care more about extra-curricular activities than they do about within-the-class learning. No wonder that Schmidt observes that the stories' "action usually focuses on dormitory life and extracurricular activities rather than on classroom activities. When the classroom is the locale of action, it is usually because of a social event, such as boys passing around a letter from one of their penpals during a class and getting caught" (1976, 77). This reality – that both the teachers and students at Mr Mukibi's school do not care about education – is unfortunate for as hooks observes, "[t]he classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (1994, 12), since to teach is not merely to pass on information "but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students […] in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students" (1994, 13). In the pages that follow, I demonstrate that the teachers in the texts under analysis fall short of investing in the intellectual and spiritual growth of the students.

The final educationist I invoke in this article is Luigi Giussani whose book, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny* (2001), contains several insights that are relevant to my discussion. He suggests that teaching should invest in critical thinking so that students are able to understand the reasons behind what is being proposed, for instance why it is necessary that they respect the teachers or why it is wrong to escape from school. This approach enables the educator to take the risk of guiding the student on a path in which he or she acts "with increasing independence and to face the world around him [sic] on his own" (2001, 81). In the Moses series, it is only Mr Karanja we see taking this risk upon realizing that beating the students every time they make a mistake is not helping him make them rational and responsible human beings.

Literature Review

Reviews on Quality Education in Uganda

Uganda is experiencing a problem of low-quality education as evidenced by dilapidated infrastructure, demotivated staff who occasionally strike for better pay, "low literacy and numeracy rates" and "high dropout rates" (Odama et al., 2025, 135). This is attributed to decades of neglect of the education sector characterized by low funding (Nafula, 2025). Two areas of neglect are the dwindling levels of school inspections as a quality assurance measure and the flaunting of the Teachers' Code of Conduct.

Jerry Bagaya et al. reveal that "inspection positively influences pedagogy" and give impressive statistics from a doctoral study to support this (2025, 119). In their study, they found that "62.6% of the respondents reported that as a result of inspection, teachers consistently prepared schemes of work and lesson plans while 77.4% of them indicated that school inspection had an influence on the way teachers planned lessons" (Bagaya et al., 2025, 119). Unfortunately, the same study found out that most of the time, inspection of schools is "poorly planned, pays little attention to classroom practices, provides inadequate feedback, lacks systematic follow up arrangements, [and] is over dependent on flying visits, thereby according inspectors limited contact time with teachers" (2025, 115). Because of this, the Ministry of Education and Sports cannot stamp out "poor teaching methods that render learners inactive" and those that encourage "cramming at the expense of understanding concepts", thereby leading to "low achievement levels in national assessments" (Bagaya et al., 2025, 115). In the Moses series, we do not see any inspection of teachers taking place; the only inspection we see in *Moses in Trouble* is a health-themed one arising from Moses's acute malnutrition. Consequently, the teachers in Mr Mukibi's school remain unfit for their teacherly duties (save for Mr Karanja as I show in a moment).

While the Uganda's Teachers' Code of Conduct requires teachers to "prepare schemes of work, lessons, instructional materials, teach all lessons as per the timetable, assess learners, mark the tests and give feedback to the learners" (cited in Odama et al., 2025, 135), in the Moses Series, it is not clear whether all these activities take place as most of the teachers except Mr Karanja seem uninterested in their work. Given Mr Mukibi's penchant for saving money by avoiding to provide necessities like adequate nutritious food for the students, he does not embody the qualities the Code of Conduct expects of him, that is to say, being "the custodian of good educational standards in his or her school" and "aim[ing] at high education standards through support supervision

and encouraging continuous professional development of the teachers" (cited in Odama et al., 2025, 136).

Reviews on Barbara's Kimenye's Moses Series

Although one of Uganda's most prolific writers with more than 20 titles to her name, there is little critical output on Kimenye partly because of the genre she works in – children's literature – an area that has not attracted critical attention among scholars of Ugandan literature because "it was not thought important to teach" (Aaron Mushengyezi cited in Oldfield, 2010, 200). Schmidt's "The Writer as Teacher: A Comparison of the African Adventure Stories of G. A. Henty, Rene Guillot, and Barbara Kimenye" (1976) is one of the earliest commentaries on Kimenye's Moses series. It is insightful in several aspects, but also intriguing, for instance her observation that "the Moses stories cannot be said to have morals, although it is clear from their contexts that some behaviours are not desirable" (1976, 77). I find this observation contradictory in the sense that by censoring certain behaviours, Kimenye indirectly calls into question the moral behaviour of the boys, thereby calling them to order. For the purpose of this article, however, the relevance of Schmidt's observation above lies in the fact that when we look at the Moses series carefully, there are several lessons we glean from the way Mr Mukibi's school is run and from the way the teachers go about their business irrespective of the morality of the stories.

Abasi Kiyimba observes that in her writing, Kimenye "gives the impression of a pro-establishment writer […] since there are no overt anti-establishment sentiments of social protests, such as those that occur in the work of Mary Okurut, Goretti Kyomuhendo and others who write in a later generation [but] the work itself speaks a language of its own which independently communicates on the above issues" (2008, 195). This observation – that Kimenye's work has a language of its own in communicating issues pertinent to the nation – is apt for she manages to criticize the education system of the country in which her books are set (the Uganda of the 1960s) for failing to inspect the schools as a quality assurance measure. As Anna Adima observes, Kimenye's Moses series, for instance *Moses in Trouble*, subtly comments on important topics like the abuse of parents and teachers, thereby "providing ironic yet humorous commentary on the post-independence state" and "extending debates on decolonisation and the meaning of independence to further echelons of society" (2022, 115). In line with this observation, I focus on the lessons on pedagogy that I draw from the selected texts and how they can serve as a springboard for debates on educational reform in the country.

In "The Uses of Humor in Barbara Kimenye's Moses Series" (Kahyana, 2022, 99-114), I examined how Kimenye deploys humour in her work through characterization and description. I observed that Mr Karanja, the deputy headteacher at Mr Mukibi's school, at some point realizes that beating the defiant Moses Kibaya and Sebastian Mulutu will not succeed in disciplining them into rules-abiding students. This forces him to change his approach to them from a militant one based on corporal punishment to a cordial one based on dialogue. In this article, I explain the educational value of this pedagogy of dialogue as opposed to the pedagogy of militancy.

Research Methodology

My research approach is qualitative because I am interested in a detailed analysis of the selected texts about how they depict learning in the imaginary school

where they are set. The research design I have chosen is descriptive. Sandra L. Siedlecki observes that "descriptive studies look at the characteristics of a population; identify problems that exist within a unit, an organization, or a population; or look at variations in characteristics or practices between institutions or even countries" (2020, 8). I also use a case study design because I focus on "an individual representative of a group" (in this case the two storybooks, *Moses* and *Moses in Trouble*) and "a phenomenon" (in this case the pedagogical flaws as depicted in the storybooks) (Hancock et al., 15). For the research paradigm, I deploy interpretivism, which focuses "primarily on understanding and accounting for the meaning of human experiences and actions" (Fossey et al., 2002, 720). The human experiences and actions that I analyse here are those of the characters in the Moses series, with specific reference to the protagonist, Moses Kibaya, and the deputy headteacher, Mr Karanja. I also deploy a constructionist approach which allows me to imagine an education reality based on contextual factors as articulated in the Moses series (Lincoln, 1990). According to Bybee and Robertson, constructivist approaches to curriculum development "rely heavily on determining students' prior knowledge and structuring instruction accordingly" (1992, 1180). In the context of this article, this requires teachers to have a good understanding of students' backgrounds to develop strategies tailored to the students' needs. For instance, knowing the fact that Moses has been expelled from different schools because of indiscipline requires the teachers to ask why this is the case so that they design/construct better strategies to keep him focused on learning.

The method of data collection I employed is close reading which entails exploring the text by "observing any information of particular interest in an interplay between the text and the reader" (Ohrvik, 2024, 248), for instance what happens in the text, the characters involved, the language and style the writer deploys, its effect on the reader, and so forth. In other words, close reading requires the reader to delve into "the form and structure of the text, gaining insight into the usage, purpose, and contextual significance of the language" (Ohrvik, 2024, 248) in order to make observations and reflections "about the style or genre of the text at hand, or about its author, or reflections on the era in which it was written" (Smith, 2016, 69-70). Data analysis involved examining the context and the themes of the texts in relation to the major focus of the study, viz, the lessons on pedagogy the reader draws from Kimenye's the Moses series.

Making Curriculum Implementation (Instruction) Attractive to Students

The storybooks in the Moses series make it clear that the students do not find the formal curriculum interesting; this is partly why they are in the habit of escaping from the school in the quest of something exciting. In *Moses*, for instance, the eponymous hero wants to learn how to fly an aeroplane; he also yearns to become a famous movie star like Sidney Poitier. His friend, Sebastian Mulutu, yearns for something sensational and romantic – marrying the South African musical icon, Miriam Makeba. The storybook makes it clear that for these kinds of students (prodigal and defiant), it is important that the classroom teacher or school administrator devise ways of making the curriculum interesting and relevant to the dreams and aspirations they have so that they take being in school seriously. In fact, Moses Kibaya, the first-person narrator of the book tells the reader that the students "would have voted in favour of anything as long as it wasted some lesson time" (Kimenye, 2013a, 25).

Mr Karanja, perhaps the most qualified and perceptive of the teachers, appreciates this when he becomes the acting headteacher, owing to Mr Mukibi getting indisposed: He finds a way of integrating co-curricular activities into the students' life. One of the co-curricular activities he introduces is birdwatching; the other club he intends to found is the dramatic society. Ingeniously, Mr Karanja makes bird-watching a preserve of the disciplined students: This is how Moses Kibaya and Sebastian Mulutu miss the inaugural exercise. By tying membership of the club to discipline, Mr Karanja imbues co-curricular activities with the ability to encourage students to behave better in order not to miss out on outings when they are next organised.

Integrating students' interests in what they are studying is important: In the storybook, it is what convinces Moses Kibaya to stay in school after trying to run away several times. In the conversation that Mr Karanja has with him, it becomes clear that he (Moses) wants to become a movie star, so he considers whatever he is studying at Mr Mukibi's school as having no value for him. Mr Karanja finds a way of using Moses Kibaya's dreams to interest him in the school as the dialogue below shows:

> You want to go to America and become a film star. Personally, I can see nothing wrong with your ambition. But I'm willing to bet that the moment you have to face stiff competition from other actors, or you can't have the best role in a film or play, you will storm away in an angry temper, saying people treat you badly.
>
> No, I wouldn't run away, because I know I will be the best African actor in the world!
>
> Alright right!" he snapped back at me. "Prove it by staying here and helping me start the Dramatic Society. It will be good training for you, and we shall soon know whether or not you have the stamina for the acting profession!
>
> You want me to help you?
>
> I was astonished, for I could not remember anyone ever asking for my assistance before.
>
> Yes. You will get a chance to act, of course, but first I want you to learn the basic things about stagecraft – things like production, scenic design and lighting … in fact, stage managing. Here …
>
> He pushed a book across the desk, and when I picked it up, I saw it was entitled *Amateur Dramatics*.
>
> Take that and read it until you know it backwards, then come to see me and then we'll discuss how it can help us with our society (Kimenye, 2013a, 82).

I have given this long quotation because there are many points that it clarifies. First, Mr Karanja uses a dialogic approach here to help Moses Kibaya discover that he can use his time at Mukibi's Institute to prepare for an acting career in America. Through a carefully thought-out dialogue, he teaches Moses Kibaya that the dream of a successful movie career starts at Mr Mukibi's Institute, if only he can listen to the advice that he, Mr Karanja, is giving him. In fact, at the end of the storybook, the drama society is running, with Moses playing a big part in it. Here is what he tells the reader:

> The Dramatic Society is flourishing in numbers at least; we have not yet chosen our play for the Drama Festival, because everybody considers himself equal to

> a star role and nobody is willing to accept a minor part. Our last meeting ended in a brawl, I'm sorry to say. However, Mr Karanja has approved my idea that we give special jobs, such as dress designing, scenery painting and so on, to various groups which will make them feel important and whittle down the number of would-be actors. I think the situation will be considerably improved next term (Kimenye, 2013a, 91).

This quotation shows that Moses Kibaya is no longer contemplating escaping from the school because he is busy organizing his fellow students for the drama festival. By founding the Dramatic Society and putting him in charge of it, Mr Karanja 'cures' his ceaseless desire to escape from the school to the extent that he is now looking forward to next term. He has learnt so much from Mr Karanja that his attitude to Mr Mukibi's school changes: "I was beginning to understand what was meant by the saying, 'the students make the school, not the school the students'" (Kimenye, 2013, 91). That the dialogic approach used by Mr Karanja leads to this change evokes Paulo Freire's oft-quoted view that dialogue makes education "the practice of freedom — as opposed to education as the practice of domination" (2005, 81). In fact, in the dialogue between Mr Karanja and Moses Kibaya, the teacher becomes "more of a facilitator than a keeper and 'imparter' of knowledge" (Beames et al., 2012, 9). Mr Karanja becomes more than just a teacher and administrator of the school, but also a pastoral carer who is interested in the welfare of Moses and other students. He is therefore an example of those "teachers who enter the teaching profession with not only a commitment to giving instruction in a certain subject to students as clientele so as to earn a living and affirm their social status, but also a commitment to the well-being or the totality of the students as individuals" (Lu, 2022, 599). Moses's confession that he was astonished on hearing Mr Karanja ask for his help since he "could not remember anyone ever asking for my assistance before" (Kimenye, 2013a, 91), underlines the fact that "[i]f teachers were really to listen to students, learning and relationships would improve, suggesting that student voice is closely linked to school improvement" (Bergmark, 2008, 268). This reminds me of bell hooks' observation that "everyone in the classroom is a resource and should therefore be treated as such by the teacher" (1994, 8), so teachers, students and parents should work together to make learning attractive.

Secondly, Mr Karanja's statement – that he needs Moses Kibaya's help – deeply touches the young man since, as he says, he "could not remember anyone ever asking for my assistance" (Kimenye, 2013a, 82). This is because his own uncle, Silas, who is paying his school fees, does not esteem him: He sees him as a failure in life and a burden to the extent that he brings him to Mr Mukibi's Institute not expecting him to receive great education, but to keep him out of mischief. This is why he tells him, "I shall find the strictest, most disciplined school in the whole of East Africa for you! And if they won't take you, then I shall see one of the welfare officers about putting you in a reformatory!" (Kimenye, 2013a, 3). So, to hear the acting headteacher ask him for his help, Moses Kibaya feels esteemed for the first time in his school life, and this makes him listen to Mr Karanja attentively, and to do as he asks him to. Incorrigible as he seems to be, Moses Kibaya has been searching for love and understanding, and when he sees it in Mr Karanja, he responds positively.

Finally, a dialogic approach, as opposed to a punitive one, is what works for defiant students like Moses Kibaya. Expelling them from school (as Mr Karanja was

considering doing) or subjecting them to one corporal punishment after another (as Mr Karanja has done before) has not been of any help. The implication here is that teachers need to find novel ways of dealing with problematic students: They need to vary their teaching approaches depending on the kind of students they are dealing with. Unfortunately, it is only Mr Karanja who seems to be up to task. The geography teacher, Mr Lutu, for instance, looks so nervous that Moses wonders whether "he had any idea of what he was talking about" (Kimenye, 2013a, 13). If teachers are to earn the respect of the students, they need to create a dialogic relationship with them the way Mr Karanja does, and they need to be confident, not nervous.

The Urgent Need for a Learner-Cantered to Learning and Instruction

One of the issues that the Moses series dramatizes is the difficulties that a teacher encounters when dealing with a learner who refuses "to conform to the construct of the docile and obedient child" (Oldfield, 2010, 204). Moses Kibaya and Sebastian Mulutu clash with authority all the time, which is why they are usually expelled from one school after another. In fact, *Moses* opens with the statement, "I had just been expelled from my sixth school" (Kimenye, 2013a, 1) because "the history teacher, Miss Kalimuzo, said I was always prowling around her house at night when she was getting ready for bed" (2013a, 2). The impression is that he was suspected of planning some mischief, perhaps sexually assaulting Miss Kalimuzo, or robbing her. But this was not on his mind as he explains: "In fact, it was just fate that made the gap in her [Miss Kalimuzo's] back garden hedge the only safe exit from the school to the village bar" (2013a, 2). It is implied that Moses Kibaya is expelled summarily; he is not given a chance to explain why he happened to hover around Miss Kalimuzo's home every time she was about to go to bed. That is to say, the disciplinary process is not student-centred which inevitably makes it punitive.

The storybook makes it clear that sometimes, what is called indiscipline is the students' creative ways of resisting mistreatment, for instance when they protest against the bad food that they are given at school by doing what must have brought a lot of embarrassment to the school administration: "We collected all the cockroaches we found in the school meals, and sent them, with our headmaster's compliments, by registered post, to the Minister for Education" (Kimenye, 2013b, 1). The students are making an important point here: They are asking the Ministry of Education officials to be vigilant about their inspection of schools to ensure that the welfare of the students is not compromised. Rather than ensure that the food is improved so that the students do not have to write such a letter to the Ministry of Education again, Mr Mukibi punishes them by making them "do the kitchen work and incidentally, save money on staff wages" (Kimenye, 2013b, 6). To make matters worse, the supplies are not adequate, so the students are forced to steal pawpaws and milk, to mention just two items. This not only compromises their morality but also leads to some of them being arrested by the police. The school administrators' unwillingness to pay attention to the students' needs is what pushes them into a life of truancy as they escape from school to find what to eat.

It is possible that Moses Kibaya would have been a disciplined boy if he had a role model – someone who challenges him to do better in life. In his book *The Risk of Education*, the Italian educationist Luigi Giussani called this person an authority (from the Greek word *auctoritas*, what causes growth). To Giussani, an authority "arouses

surprise, novelty, and respect" (2001, 64). The only character in the storybook who comes close to doing this is Mr Karanja, the Deputy Headteacher, who tries everything possible in his power to educate the students by starting a dialogue with them – a learner-centred methodology that demonstrates his willingness to listen to their perspectives. There is nothing the students can emulate from Mr Mukibi, the proprietor of the school, the storybook suggests. For instance, he smokes yet he punishes students for smoking. In fact, he confiscates Moses's cigarettes and thereafter smokes them, leaving Moses shaken by "a headteacher who pinches things" (Kimenye, 2013a, 12). There is also little, if anything, they can emulate in the nervous Mr Lutu and the pretentious Miss Nagendo (she has no knowledge of nursing but fancies about the sanatorium like she is an expert medical officer).

Moses Kibaya's guardians are no better. He says he is always subjected to abuse from his uncle, Silasi (Kimenye 2013a, 1) to the extent that when he (Silasi) threatens to take him to a reformatory if he fails to get a school that will discipline him, Moses responds thus: "I was tired of always being shouted at and regarded as a criminal, or even worse, continually being told how grateful I should be […] simply because Uncle Silasi and Aunt Damali had agreed to bring me up as their own son after my parents were both carried off in a small epidemic some years ago" (Kimenye, 2013a, 5). To make matters worse, Uncle Silasi and Aunt Damali do not involve Moses Kibaya in choosing the school he is being taken to as he explains:

> As we drove away from the house, I knew exactly how a condemned man must feel on his way to the execution chambers. But no doubt a condemned man is aware of his final destination, whereas I had not the slightest idea of where I was being taken nor of what lay in store for me at the end of the journey (Kimenye, 2013a, 6).

It is no wonder that he spends time "trying to strategize how I could escape from them forever" (Kimenye, 2013a, 5) because the schools they take him to feel, to use the words of bell hooks, "more like a prison, a place of punishment and confinement rather than a place of promise and possibility" (1994, 4), where teachers "enact rituals of control that [are] about domination and the unjust exercise of power" (1994, 5). Perhaps what proves beyond doubt that Uncle Silasi fails in his parenting and educative role is the fact that he often predicts that Moses Kibaya will "come to a bad end" (Kimenye, 2013b, 77).

Whether we look at education as "*educare*, which means to train or to mold" or "*educere*, meaning to lead out" (Bass and Good, 2004, 162), the portrait Kimenye gives us of Uncle Silasi is of a man who is not interested in training Moses Kibaya or leading out his talents and potentials. Bass and Good's suggestion that parents/guardians should be involved in the education of their children "as teachers – knowledgeable about the curricula and prepared to work with their children" (2004, 167) cannot be implemented by Uncle Silasi because all he is interested is not the curricula but discipline, understood as unquestioning obedience to rules. The disciplinary regime in both the school and the home does not allow for transformative instruction because it is not centred on the needs and yearnings of the child.

I would like to underline the fact that the success that Mr Karanja has with Moses Kibaya and Sebastian Mulutu shows that discipline is not the starting point of a

relationship, but its consequence; for this reason, teachers and parents should esteem the child in order to win them over to behave well.

Curriculum Monitoring: The Challenge of Poor Supervision of Schools by the Ministry of Education and Sports

The Moses series makes it clear that the Ministry of Education is not doing its work of supervising the schools in the country where the Moses storybooks are set. There are four indications of this. First, the school has poor-quality infrastructure. The buildings are described as shabby (most of them have thatched roofs) and the compound looks like one "that no self-respecting cowherd would allow his beasts to graze in" (Kimenye, 2013a, 7). For the kitchen and the dining hall, they are "bad-smelling holes with walls on the point of collapse" (Kimenye, 2013a, 8-9). Of course, here, the author is using the narrative device called hyperbole which is defined as "exaggeration for the sake of emphasis in a figure of speech not meant literally" to highlight how terrible the compound looks and how unhygienic the kitchen is (Baldick, 2001, 119). Had the Ministry of Education done its supervisory role, the administration would have been pressed to put up better buildings, kitchens and dining halls, or to renovate the existing ones.

Second, the school has inadequate facilities. The narrator tells the reader that the dormitories "were so overcrowded that the two rows of beds in each had less than six inches of space between them [and] the classrooms were so packed that the boys were sharing single desks" (Kimenye, 2013a, 8). It is no wonder that in the second book in the series – *Moses in Trouble* – the headteacher cannot adequately feed the students, thereby leading them to fend for themselves, including through stealing. Had the Ministry of Education inspected the schools regularly, it would have recommended that the proprietor of the school, Mr Mukibi, admit the number of students commensurate to the facilities in place.

Third, the reader is told that the school does not have adequate qualified teachers. In fact, Moses observes that "Mr Karanja was the only qualified member of the staff, and it was purely through his efforts that one or two boys had managed to pass the Junior Secondary Leaving Examination" (Kimenye, 2013a, 20). This shows that the Ministry of Education has neglected its cardinal duty of monitoring the quality of education that is being given in the schools, for even when just one or two students pass examinations, the officials at the ministry do not interest themselves in finding out why this is the case. It is this kind of neglect that forces the students to do the dastardly act of mailing dead cockroaches to the Minister for Education as I observed earlier, which is a defiant call to the ministry's officials to interest themselves in matters like the quality of physical infrastructure, the ratio of the students to the teachers, the quality of teaching and learning, and the quality of food served.

Finally, the teachers are depicted as being shabby and unpresentable. To Moses Kibaya the narrator, Mr Karanja was

> the only member of the staff who did not look shabby, undernourished and worried to death. It was not only that he was taller than the rest and carried himself more confidently. There was something about the way his hair was cut and the general neatness of his clothes. So far as I could see, his were the only

> shoes that did not need mending, and they were shinier than anybody else's (Kimenye, 2013a, 24).

The shabbiness of the teachers highlighted here is another instance of the Ministry of Education not enforcing the teachers' professional code of conduct which stipulates that teachers shall "dress appropriately, decently and smartly while on duty; attend to his or her personal appearance, ensuring a neat and pleasant outlook while on duty as well as in the community [and] be a positive role model at school and in the community" (Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Uganda, 2012, 9). One might argue that *Moses* was published in 1968 before this professional code of conduct was published. This is true, but I should note that since time immemorial, teachers have been expected to be role models to their students in myriad matters including dressing. Indeed, John Martin Rich observes that "school boards and communities expect teachers to set good examples and act as exemplars to students in their dress, grooming, social amenities, and morals" (1991, 94).

I would like to mention that in Uganda, it is not uncommon to find private schools which are not registered with the Ministry of Education and Sports (Andebo, 2025). Likewise, with the increasing marketization and monetization of education in the country, it is not uncommon to find private schools position themselves as profit-making enterprises thereby leading to "issues of quality, equity and oversight" (Andebo, 2025). Mr Mukibi's fictional school therefore serves to remind the reader about the dangers of profit-oriented, poorly regulated private schools as potential crime scenes where unprofessionalism, neglect and fraud abound. By dramatizing the sorry state of the school, Kimenye indirectly calls upon the government to "exercise its oversight through appropriate regulatory frameworks to improve quality standards and ensure that the private actors operate within set regulations to provide good-quality education" (Andebo, 2025).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The storybooks in the Moses series challenge every teacher to look into their teaching practices and ask the question: *Am I simply teaching a subject to the students under my care, or am I educating them, through the subjects I teach and through other engagements I have with them, to understand who they are and to discover what their mission in life is?* For Mr Mukibi the proprietor of the Mukibi Educational Institute for the Sons of African Gentlemen, what matters is not educating, but making lots of money, which is why he hires unqualified teachers. For Miss Lutu and Miss Nagendo, we do not see any impact they make on the lives of the students under their care. But Mr Karanja tries to bring out the best in the boys at the school: He introduces co-curricular activities; he tries to improve the school diet, and he gets time to dialogue with errant boys to show them where they are going wrong. True, he sometimes beats the boys as a way of instilling discipline into them, but he is aware that dialogue is a more effective way of drawing out the best from the boys than caning them.

What the above discussion shows is that there is a lot to learn from the Moses series with regard to the design of our schools (let us make them attractive to the learners) and the way we run them (let us do it with love, care and consideration for the learners) so that they become places where knowledge is imparted, talent is nurtured, and character is built, instead of being places where children plan mischief and where

discipline is instilled into them not through reflective dialogue and sound reason, but through the sheer brutal power of kicks and sticks.

The following are the recommendations I have gleaned from the series. First, the government of Uganda needs to take its regulatory obligations seriously by ensuring that all private schools are registered and periodically inspected for compliance with the quality standards of the Ministry of Education and Sports and the stipulations of the Teachers' Code of Conduct. This is important because "[r]esearch shows that effective school inspection identifies training needs of the staff and builds the capacity of schools to enhance efficiency, resourcefulness and competence of teachers" (Bagaya, et al., 2025, 123).

Second, the government should invest in leadership training for school administrators to improve the quality of administration in educational institutions. Urick and Bowers (cited in Odama, et al., 2025, 138) outline what transformative leadership is about: "Building school vision and goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, modelling professional practices and values, demonstrating high performance expectations, and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions."

Finally, the government needs to revisit its privatization policy that has led to the proliferation of profit-orientated private schools – an unfortunate development that de-centres education from its position as "a public good that is central to Uganda's socio-economic and political development" (Andiebo, 2025, 2020). For a school like Mr Mukibi's to promote Uganda's development agenda, the government needs to ensure that it has transformative education, not profit-making, as its goal. Kimenye's fiction can therefore serve as a wake-up call to the Ministry of Education and Sports to take its mandate of quality assurance seriously.

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