

Is international schooling

By Gloria Nakajubi

The International Baccalaureate, American School curriculum, English national curriculum and many more; is an endless list of curricula offered in the fast-growing market of international schools.

Unlike in the past when international schools were a preserve of diplomats and expatriates, the local population has embraced these schools with an estimated enrolment share of up to 80%. It is not just the elite, but also the rich and most times not highly educated folks, opting for international schools.

“Today, international schools are the aspiration of the growing middle-classes of developing economies that are the key drivers of growth within the sector,” states the *World Education News and Reviews*.

“They have transformed the market from a largely non-profit model to one that is predominantly for profit and teaching a curriculum with an international focus as opposed to that of a particular nation,” adds the review.

Demand is shaped by income dimensions and for the growing middle and business class, it is no longer just about a school, but what it can offer.

In Uganda, the education ministry could hardly avail *New Vision* with a list of international schools or even statistics.

The biggest question, however, is; are international schools worth the millions parents dole out every year for their children’s education?

The cost of educating a child at an international school varies considerably, depending on location of the school, facilities, academic programmes and its ownership. There is a massive difference in the fees charged in each of the schools in the country.

However, averagely schools charge about sh24m to sh40m annually. Most of the time, the higher the class a child gets to, the higher the cost; for most international schools’ tuition levies.

In comparison to private and local schools in Uganda, the most expensive may charge about sh6m a year. The cheapest and good

Unlike local schools which have been faulted for focusing on academics, hence stifling other talents, international schools make an all-round student



IN FIGURES

25 LEARNERS
The maximum number of students in class of an international school

3.6 MILLION
The average monthly salary paid to teachers in international schools

1 MILLION
The salary of teachers in top private schools under the local curriculum

private schools may charge about sh1.5m a year.

But, apart from costs, parents consider several other factors when choosing schools for their children and costs may not be the underlying factor.

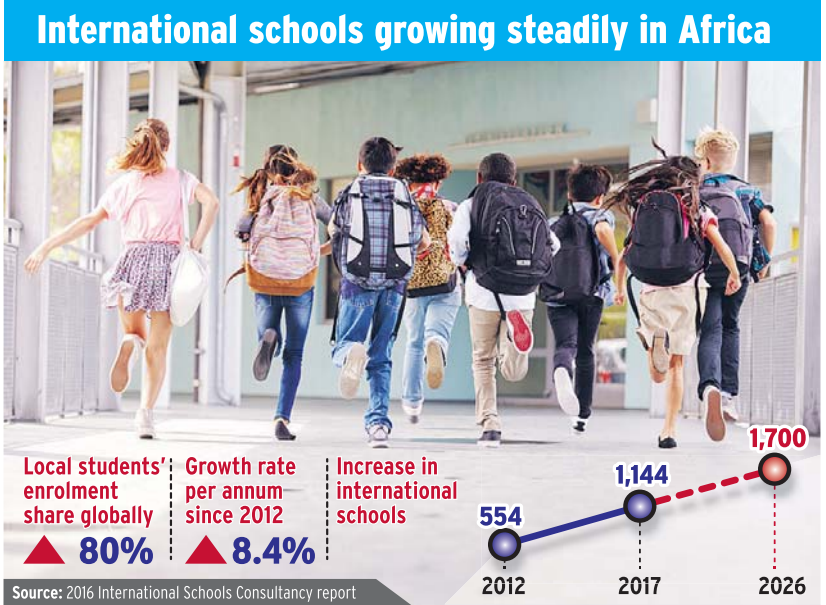
IS IT WORTH IT?

For a child who will grow to become a global citizen, proponents of international curricula have argued that despite the differences in the different international schools settings, one unique characteristic they share is ‘the desire to create global citizens’.

These global citizens are expected to have an understanding of other cultures beyond their own national perspective.

A National Curriculum Development Centre expert, Mathias Mulumba, argues that international schools teach skills needed for an effective life.

He adds: “To achieve this, there has to be an equal investment in the aspects that make a good school. These include physical environment, teaching materials,



good curriculum, methods of teaching, assessment and school management.”

“Our local curriculum pen-and-paper method. International

schools, however, follow a triangulated module. Observation, conversation,

Trends

A 2016 international schools Consultancy report showed that international schools in Africa with special focus on English-based curriculum had registered an 8.4% growth rate per annum since 2012. The schools increased from 554 in 2012 to the current 1,144. They are expected to rise to 1,700 by 2026.

A more or less equal share of growth was registered in terms of student enrolment with a 7.4% increase per annum. From 0.24 million students in 2012, international schools in Africa have an enrolment of 0.32 million students and forecasted to reach 0.45 million by 2021.

But the African market, as established by the survey, is still 'a less exciting commercial proposition for establishment of new for-profit schools'.

CHARACTERISTICS

■ The student body and the teaching staff will be multi-national and multi-lingual (to varying extents) and both are likely to be more transient than in the average school.

■ The curriculum is likely to be international, or the school will follow a curriculum different from that of the national education system of its host country. Because of this, it should be relatively easy for students to move from one international school to another, even on the other side of the world or to return to their home country's education system.

■ An international school usually prepares its pupils for higher education destinations beyond the host country. This is a clear part of the mission in these schools.

■ There is a special culture: an international school promotes international education in its widest sense. This means more than just being in an international environment or having an international curriculum and multinational students. It's about the school's values, actions and ethos. In this sense, a great deal can be learnt about the internationalism of a school from things such as its History curriculum, the value placed on languages, the existence of school exchanges, overseas visits, online partnerships, and so on.

worth your millions?

project assignments — all contribute to the assessment of a child. One needs money to do all this," Mulumba says.

In a triangulated model of teaching, teachers use a variety of assessment strategies to elicit information about student achievement.

Learning, according to Mulumba, occurs with well-motivated staff. This is what international schools are doing. Their staff are paid more than double the salaries local schools pay. But even then, the class sizes will at maximum accommodate 25 students compared to most local schools that have more or triple this number.

International schools offer an academically sound curriculum, rich extra-curricular activities, motivated teachers, creative learning environments and excellent support systems for global families on the move.

CURRICULUM

According to Mohammed Kakiika, an international curriculum specialist, parents painfully opt for a local curriculum for their children, which not only takes students through a rigorous study process, but does not help them to think independently.

"Children have to do over 100 questions in homework and several pre-national exam assessments in the form of tests. This is because the idea is for them to cram facts just as the old Cambridge curriculum. They have to pass. But the international curriculum assesses through projects that learners can even adopt as business ideas at the end of school," he said.

According to Winters International Schools Finder, an online international schools guide, such institutions are designed to allow children, especially for parents on the move, to continue their education in a stimulating environment.

The environment is not different from what they are used to and that will allow them to smoothly transfer back to their home country or to the next placement location of the family's breadwinner.

Dr Arthur Bainemugisha of Makerere University, argues that the uncertainty that comes with the current local curriculum has seen parents look elsewhere and, in this case, to international schools.

"With increasing incomes, some parents feel the local curriculum no longer affords their children the required advantage thereafter. This therefore, leaves them with the option of international schooling," he says.

His biggest fear with international schooling, however, is that such training is likely to dissuade



Teachers in international schools assess the learners' achievement using various strategies

learners from appreciating their own country and instead feel comfortable moving. This trend is usually referred to as modern day slavery.

DISTINCTION IN RESULTS

A child who has attended an international school is different from the one who has gone through the local curriculum. The contrast is clear and for most parents, this is what they are looking for. They will go an extra mile to ensure that their children get that. But quite important to note is that as more parents get exposed, the need to have their children achieve what they did not achieve is driving many to opt for international schools.

From his experience as a human resource performance trainer, Sudesh Kaka explains that products of international schools most times do not end up in the traditional workplace. This probably gives them an added advantage given the fact that the traditional workplace in its current state cannot absorb all school graduates.

"Students that have gone through the international curriculum are confident to start up something, but also creative enough to see life with different lenses. They will wonder why things have to follow a certain routine," Kaka says. He adds that such a curriculum

enables students have an alternative thinking towards life.

Learning in international schools, according to Kaka, is practical, which makes it richer and more empowering. Such kind

Tuition fees

International schools, according to Mohammed Kakiika, an international curriculum specialist, on average pay teachers \$1,000 (about sh3.6m) compared to the sh1m teachers in schools under the local curriculum earn, especially top private schools.

"One is not going to pay sh700,000 and expect the same services as a parent parting with \$2,000 (sh7.2m) per semester. There is a stark difference not only between the way we teach, but also the environment in which our learners are taught," Kakiika said.

of learning, he argues, is worth every penny because at the end of the cycle, a parent is not stuck with a child that cannot do something for themselves.

With youth unemployment standing at over 70%, there has been increasing debate to have the local curriculum revamped without success. The current curriculum has been castigated for creating job-seekers and not job-creators.

Local schools have also been faulted for focusing on academics, hence stifling other talents which make children versatile and employable.

Kaka explains that international schools open up a learners' mind to think critical. Learners tend to demand

more of themselves.

ENROLLING

For parents who intend to enrol their children at an international university, the question of international or local schooling becomes paramount. It is easier for a student to be enrolled at such institutions if they have an international schooling background.

However, having international schools in the predominantly local school's sector has, as argued by the different experts, set the bar high, which other schools can aspire to achieve.

Schools under the local curriculum have a lot to learn from the growing number of international ones, especially for a sector that is still grappling with issues of quality, a value that international schools pride in.

"Our education system, even with this obvious competition, has not seen any deliberate efforts for improvement. We shall come to a point where we are teaching for the western world as more and more parents switch to international schools," Bainemugisha says.

Quite important, however, is that whether opting for international schooling or the local curriculum, this remains a choice largely dependent on financial power, along other considerations. Every parent would want the best for their child, especially education.

**Additional information from
Winters International
Schools finder**

8%
The growth
rate of
international
schools since
2012