

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS GUIDE

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Nurturing global citizens



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character with
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Social skills

By Caroline Jacoby

Parents, family and friends play a crucial role in the partnership of learning between school and home. Children achieve better at school when their parents demonstrate that they care about their children's school life by being involved in their child's schooling. Parents' active involvement in children's education helps a child develop a positive attitude towards learning.

In the coming week, most international schools will be beginning the new school year after the long summer break. Many students (and parents) will be transitioning into their school from other countries and other schools from within Uganda. This usually brings both excitement and anxiety.

All students will be moving into new classes and meeting new teachers and classmates, and learning new routines. It takes time for students to adjust to being back at school, so they benefit from your support at home. At the International School of Uganda, we believe that educating children should be a partnership between parents and the school. Your child's school will have many programmes and strategies in place to help them adjust to the new school year, but there are also ways that you can use to help the children at home:

● Talk to them positively

How to support your child at start of school year

Parents are encouraged to support their children at the start and during the term. This can be through guiding the children with their homework, attending school events and showing interest in what they do



about the coming year. Help build positive anticipation.

● Make sure that they have all the supplies that they need for the beginning of the year. Your child's school will tell you what they need to bring with them. Help them keep track of their belongings by labelling them.

● Attend orientation sessions and back-to-school nights that your child's school holds, to make sure you understand the curriculum, expectations and how you can support your child at home. This also gives you the chance to meet your child's teachers and parents of

other children in the class.

● If your child has any special needs, make sure that the school is aware of these and that they have the means to support them. Share with the school any particularly effective strategies you have for supporting your child.

● At the end of each day, ask your child about their day, if they respond, "Nothing", ask them more specifics. "What was the best part of your day?", "What made you laugh?" "Who did you play with at break time?"

● Help them make friends

by arranging play dates. Learning is a social activity. Your child will be more successful at school if they have friends who they enjoy being with at school.

Throughout the year, it is important to clearly demonstrate how important their education is to you. Remember, we are our children's learning models. Our attitudes about education can inspire theirs and show them how to take charge of their own educational journey. Here are ways of achieving this:

● Attend parent meetings, sports and arts events

● Help guide your child with their homework

● Follow their progress through online school management/reporting systems

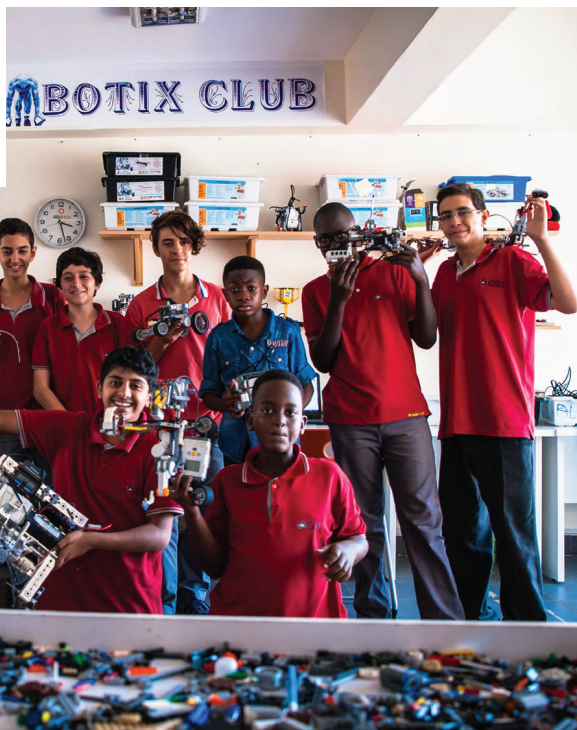
● Serve on your child's school board or on the parents, teachers association. This has the added bonus for you, that you learn more about how your child's school runs

During the year, remember that school and home are the two places where children have the opportunity to learn, develop and achieve their full potential. It is an important partnership between parents, family and the school community that helps make your child's learning a successful, fulfilling and happy journey.

The writer is the Head of the International School of Uganda



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About us

Galaxy International School Uganda (GISU) is a co-educational school located in Lubowa, 10km from Kampala, along the Kampala-Entebbe Road. Turn off before Roofings Ltd. and continue along the main road through the housing estate, about 300 metres from Quality Supermarket, the school is on the left.

The school provides international education to students between 2.5 and 19 years of age. From kindergarten to year 13 students are taught using student-centred methods. Emphasis is on the development of the whole person. Students in years 10 and 11 are prepared for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) examination and those in years 12 and 13 are prepared for Cambridge A level examination.

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By Owen Wagabaza

Two decades ago, finding an international school in Uganda was rare. But not anymore. More international schools are cropping up in Uganda every after a couple of years.

Originally created to ensure that expatriates and diplomats could get an international education for their children while working in far-flung countries, international schools have found a new purpose — educating the children of wealthy citizens so that they can compete in western colleges, and, eventually, positions in multinational organisations.

Growing numbers

The growth of international schools is staggering. Twenty years ago, there were only about 1,000 English-language international schools worldwide, according to research from the UK-based International Students Council (ISC).

According to ISC, most of the students in these schools were the children of expatriate families such as diplomats, journalists, non-government officers, technicians and mid-level corporate parents.

Today, there are more than 8,000 international schools, serving 4.5 million students with 420,000 teachers. And, 80% of students are actually from the school's host country.

According to ISC, demand is rising. In the next 10 years, experts expect the number of international schools to double to more than 16,000 schools and 8.75 million students worldwide.

Various curricula

In Uganda, international schools offer a variety of curricula, notably the Cambridge curriculum, International Baccalaureate curriculum and the Indian National curriculum, offered by Delhi Public School.

"International schools provide holistic education for children and prepare them in the best possible way to cope with the demands of the modern world. The days of crossing borders in search of better education are numbered," says Rosemary Nsimiire, a parent at Kampala International School Uganda.

Moulding global citizens

Mohammed Kakiika, the headteacher of Vienna College Namugongo, one of the pioneer international schools in Uganda, says the curricula offered by international schools play a big role in churning out global citizens.

"At Vienna College, for example, we offer the Cambridge curriculum, done in 162 countries and the



Students dressed in different traditional outfits. International schools bring together diverse cultures, which exposes the students

How international schools nurture global citizens

A student's perspective

For Andrea Magezi Taremwa, who attained quadruple A in physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics in the just released Cambridge General Certificate of Education, he is ready to take on the world.

Speaking of the learning environment at the international school he attended, he says it was engaging and practical. He adds that the school encouraged self-learning and research geared towards nurturing critical and independent thinking. He said it practically builds the strength of one's character.

The school community in international schools is diverse, bringing together several nationalities which teaches learners to appreciate each and every nationality. "I have also made lots of friends from all corners of the earth, and most importantly, with my Cambridge certificate I will be joining the world renowned Keele University for a bachelors in medicine," he said.

over 50 nationalities. As such, international schools have a much wider social community with a broader international perspective," says Lang. "There is a richness that comes from students working side-by-side with others of different nationalities. Students who attend schools with a diverse population learn to appreciate and respect other cultures and this gives them a unique character to live harmoniously with others," says Adam Ssenabulya, a psychology lecturer at

Makerere University. Ssenabulya adds that often, this appreciation for difference fosters an emotional maturity in children. A child is likely to gain life-long friendships with children from other countries around the world. "International students also tend to work through daily challenges regarding language barriers. Students even learn to live on their own, which fosters a sense of independence. Children who learn to overcome the challenges presented in international schools

usually gain confidence and maturity in the process and this prepares them to take on the world," Ssenabulya adds.

Why international schools

James Kiiza, a parent at Vienna College Namugongo, says he took his son to an international school to help him have desire for knowledge, as well as appreciating new challenges.

"We normally have students for internships, but I realised that students who had gone through the international curriculum were quite different. They were inquisitive, had desire for knowledge, were challenging and asked deeper questions and were open to life, and this is exactly what I wanted for my son," Kiiza explained.

Simpson Ssenyange, a parent at Delhi Public School, says most students who attend international schools learn more than one language and many employers see multilingualism as a desired trait. "Individuals who are bilingual usually carry out international business tasks with ease. Children who study at international schools can feel confident when looking for career opportunities because of their exposure to various world cultures and languages," says Ssenyange.



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Galaxy International School of Uganda students and staff prepare for a marathon.

By Nelson Kiva

You do not have to be privileged or an expatriate for your child to attain an education at a reputable international school.

Whether you are thinking of Aga Khan International School, Gems Cambridge International School, Kabojja International School, Galaxy International School or International School of Uganda, there are avenues for your child to enjoy world class education at an institution of your choice.

With the right insurance package, you can pre-raise money to educate your child at an international school.

According to Pamela Abonyo, who works for an insurance company, there are insurance packages through which 'school fees is guaranteed', whether you have a lot of money or not.

Abonyo says one can even start saving for the education of an anticipated child. "Depending on the policy agreed on in the saving plan, a parent or any person can save for the education of a child for a period of five to 20 years, contributing low monthly instalments," she says.

She adds that the saving can be done through the bank, mobile money or direct transfers, adding that many low income earners were embracing the product.

According to Nicholas Katushabe, an education consultant, parents can also schedule the most

Insurance can pay for your child's education



Students of Galaxy International School of Uganda reading in the library. Planning early allows one to balance resources for their child not to miss on the exposure and standards of international schools

important classes and levels their children can take from international schools and others in local schools as an alternative.

"This tacking technique allows you to balance your resources for your child not

to miss on the exposure that comes with studying at an international school," he added.

Katushabe adds that parents should start planning early. "The best time to save is now. There are a

lot of insurance packages for education, where you can save even as low as sh100,000 per month and by the time the child gets to high school, insurance takes over and covers the school fees.

Planning early helps you gather resources and avoid rush hour stress," he says. He also advises parents and guardians to look for sponsorships, bursaries and grants, because they can come in handy.

"If you really need it, you can always try these options, especially if your children are doing well in academics and sports," he adds.

Parents, he says, can also save and earn more by doubling work rate and opportunities, investing at an early age and letting investment returns take care of the education later when due.

Katushabe, however, says international schools are not affordable for families that are struggling financially.

"The estimated annual earnings of a corporate in Uganda is about \$10,000 (sh37.4). Given the demands and expenses on this corporate, it is evident he or she cannot sustainably keep children in an international school without taking loans," he says.

Katushabe adds: "To share the international experience, such schools may do well to package a few modules and share them as holiday packages, weekend or have an online school, where some few lessons can be accessed to students with affordable resource."

STUDENTS ENGAGE WITH LAPTOPS, TABLETS, DIGITAL CAMERAS AND VIDEO CONFERENCING

By Prisca Baike

From tablets to interactive white boards, international schools have incorporated various ICTs in the day-to-day teaching and learning processes. With technology becoming a deal-breaker, experts maintain that technology is an important component of teaching and learning today.

Flavia Tusubira, a parent, says her son Tyrone Tusubira was introduced to the basics of computing at an early age, which she says has made his learning easier.

"By the time he was in the Fifth Grade, he knew his way around the computer and how to do his personal research," says Tusubira, whose son wants to become a computer scientist.

She, however, notes that parents and teachers have to play a huge monitoring role since the Internet exposes children to too much information that could sometimes be misleading.

George William Semivule, an educationist, says technology in education is not a new thing, but rather, it has been evolving.

"Back in the day, projectors were popular. But today, computers have repaced them," says Semivule, noting that computers are also being fast replaced by tablets and smart phones.

Semivule explains that the use of technology in schools enables teachers to share a lot of information with learners in a short time.

Remote learning

He also notes that technology democratises education through allowing remote learning which can also be conducted outside the classroom.

"With technology, a teacher can engage his or her learners remotely, which allows the two parties to keep in touch even beyond school hours and in holidays," Semivule says.

He, however, notes that apart from the fast-changing technology that requires schools and learners to keep upgrading their gadgets and skills, technology may also pause a danger to the students, if not well controlled.

"If you don't control what the students use the technology for, then they can go astray," says Semivule, adding that all technology used in school should be solely for academic purposes.

At Galaxy International School Uganda (GISU), there is a fully-equipped IT laboratory with modern technology for all students. The school also has a Wi-Fi.

"We also participate in the International Computer Olympiad Competitions to inspire our students to use IT to the highest levels," reads



Students of Galaxy International School during a computer lesson

Technology defines international schools



Gems Cambridge has interactive whiteboards, laptops and tablet technology

a statement on the school's website.

Computer club

Students have the opportunity to join the 'ICT World', through the GISU Computer Club, which brings like-minded individuals to share in a common interest.

Gems Cambridge International School, like other national Ivy League schools, is equipped with interactive whiteboards, laptops and tablet technology. The students regularly engage with technology through the use of laptops, tablets, digital cameras and video conferencing facilities, among others.

AT GEMS, A TABLET IS SHARED BY TWO PUPILS SO THAT LEARNERS ARE TECH SAVVY

Electronic books

Pupils use digital cameras to support their learning in art

and design; keyboards and associated software in music and tablet technology in day-to-day lessons.

In their new secondary school library, students have access to electronic books.

To ensure that all their learners are tech savvy, the school has one tablet for every two pupils.

"We aim to give our students an education which will both help prepare and support them in today's increasingly competitive and technology-rich global economy and to become confident users and creators of different digital content," reads the website

Supported learning

From Early Years and Key Stage 1, Gems Cambridge students use video conferencing to support learning.

In addition, the school council, uses the ICT facilities to link up with other GEMS' pupils to discuss and explore educational themes.

Since the role of teachers in technology uptake is critical, the school ensures that its teachers are trained in Microsoft and Apple Technologies and Innovative Teaching Practices through different programmes to enable them to incorporate technology in all aspects of their work with students.

"Our aim is to ensure that all staff is sufficiently trained and confident in using the equipment we have, to support all students' learning," according to a statement from the school.

Its planned boarding facility, once completed, will also have similar technology so that boarders have access to ICT beyond the school day. The school's aim is to ensure that all children are sufficiently equipped and confident enough to use the technologies of tomorrow.

According to Caroline Jacoby, the head of

International School of Uganda (ISU), technology should be used to educate students to prepare them for life beyond school in an ever-changing world.

"The world is rapidly changing and technology is used in all aspects of our daily lives," says Jacoby.

She notes that in business, higher education and our personal lives we use technology as a daily tool for instant feedback.

Instant feedback

Jacoby explains that at ISU, teachers and students share documents, information, essays and assignments on a daily basis using computers.

"Teachers and peers give students feedback on their work so that they can improve it before final submission," says Jacoby, adding that students and teachers share documents to work collaboratively on planning.

Students use technology to record and mix music, make movies to demonstrate their learning, to record and analyse performances in physical education. Children use voice recording applications to reflect on their work for their portfolios," she says.

According to Jacoby universities and workplaces around the world expect prospective employees to be technically literate and producers of technology, not merely consumers of it.

"It is, therefore, important that we prepare our learners," says Jacoby.

Screen time

Despite the vast advantages of technology, especially screen-based technology, it comes with associated challenges if not well managed. Excessive screen time is associated with obesity, sleeping disorders, behaviour problems and violence, among others.

To address this, the American Association of Paediatrics recommends no more than 7.5 hours a day for children between 8-18 years.

On this note, Jacoby advises that learners should be made aware of the pitfalls of the excessive use of technology so that they can avoid them.

She notes that ISU uses a blended learning approach where students use pen and paper, as well as digital tools.

"As part of our life skills programme, we share the pitfalls of too much screen time with students," says Jacoby.

"We have 'screen-free' times for students to make sure they are outside and interacting with their peers."

Jacoby says the school also runs parent workshops to help equip parents to manage their children's screen time at home.

Jacoby recommends schools to teach students how to use technology responsibly to ensure that learners make the most of it.

Why co-curricular activities count

By Prisca Baike

The core aim of education is to foster an all-round development of a child. And, this, according to experts can only be achieved through a blended curriculum that includes co-curricular activities.

Although they are not examinable, educationists maintain that co-curricular activities positively impacts a child's academic performance and contributes to a holistic development of the child.

John Kiyuba, an educationist argues that a school cannot do without co-curricular activities. He says through these activities, children are able to sharpen their minds and to exercise their bodies.

Strong impact

Contrary to what many people think, Kiyuba says co-curricular activities strongly impact the learners' academic performance. Real education ought to develop a child physically, socially, emotionally as well as academically.

By being involved in after school activities, students mix with others, who are not necessarily in their class, learn new skills and in many cases learn to work as a team.

That is the kind of environment international schools offer. There are a variety of competitive and non-competitive sports, various types of dance, climbing, arts and crafts, academic support and cooking among others.

At Aga Khan High School students are encouraged to participate in co-curricular activities such as sports including soccer, cricket, basketball, athletics, lawn tennis, badminton. Other activities include clubs and house activities, East African model United Nations debates, overnight trips and student council clubs.

While club membership is voluntary, physical education

THROUGH CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, CHILDREN ARE ABLE TO SHARPEN THEIR MINDS AND ALSO EXERCISE THEIR BODIES

and fitness is compulsory. This ensures that students are physically fit and in good health.

At Galaxy International School, socialisation and physical development of their learners is highly emphasised. Sports activities such as swimming, soccer and basketball, among others are an integral part of the physical education programme and the extra-curricular programme of the school. This, the school management says, promotes the scientific knowledge of physical exercise and sports for a healthy life style and development of an individual as well as the community.

In order to enable the learners to discover and develop their potentials and talents, the school has a competitive sports programme that runs throughout the school year as part of its extra-curricular activities.

Here, students engage in both out and indoor games such as table tennis, pool table, foosball, basketball, volley ball, long tennis, swimming and football, among others.

Galaxy International School has a standard swimming pool that provides hours of fun for the active school age, teenage children and staff enjoying the space.

Safety

To ensure the safety of their learners, the swimming pool is well fenced and locked when not in use. In addition to this, there is always a supervisor during swimming lesson hours.

Sam Turya, a director at Kabojja International School, says their curriculum is hinged on co-curricular activities such as games and sports, music,

academics are simply one part of learning while co-curricular activities make up the other.

He explains that through these activities, students are able to interact and work together as a team.

He also notes that through co-curricular activities, children get to discover their talents. He explains that when a student discovers his or her talent, the school nurtures it to the benefit of the student, school and country at large.

"We train, support and highlight the importance of their talent and thereafter,

we let them soar," says Turya explaining that through co-curricular activities, many children are able to choose their career paths.

He also notes that through charity work, children are taught about caring for their communities and giving back to society. This, he says, makes children appreciate their communities more through engaging with them.

He also notes that activities such as debates help children hone their public speech skills that come in handy later in life.

Turya also explains that

through being part of certain clubs, for instance the geography club, learners get to travel to different parts of the country and the world.

"This way, they gain exposure and they benefit from the multiple travel privileges that come with the club's membership," Turya says.

He for instance notes that through the school activities, a child may discover they are talented basket baller and choose it as a career from which they can live a fulfilling life.

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Aga Khan creates a balance between academics, sporting and cultural activities and community life

BECAUSE OF THE PRESSURES ADOLESCENTS EXPERIENCE, GUIDANCE IS ESSENTIAL

By Prisca Baike

Students need social and educational support. This is a need that international schools, ahead of other schools, have emphasised as a way of offering their learners holistic education and maximising learning outcomes.

First introduced in schools in the 19th century, counselling was meant to help children develop character, avoid problems and relate with others, according to an online report.

Caroline Jacoby, the head of the International School of Uganda (ISU), says their school has two social and emotional counsellors teaching life skills programmes as part of the curriculum.

Life skills

The life skills programmes are taught in conjunction with class teachers on topics such as bullying, child protection, friendship issues and relationships, among others.

The counsellors also run friendship groups for students who may need support in that area. The same is done for new students and those transitioning at the end of the year, to give them support at those potentially challenging times.

"Our counsellors also work with individuals who need support," says Jacoby, adding that the counsellors run parent information sessions on topics, such as balancing the use of technology and other activities and transitions and sibling rivalry, among others.

Like ISU, Aga Khan High School has a qualified social counsellor, who assists teenage students to cope with challenges that arise both at home and in school, Stephen Mawanda, the head of admissions at Aga Khan Education Services, says.

"The pressure adolescents experience from all spheres of life is considerable. Counselling is, therefore, an essential component of teaching," Mawanda says.

At Aga Khan a counsellor provides guidance to teachers to ensure that each one is able to be an effective counsellor.

Teachers' input, Mawanda says, is essential for the study skills and learning support for all students' programmes, which focus on building student confidence.

He, however, notes that serious social disturbance cases can be referred to external specialists.

The counsellor also advises staff on incorporating HIV/AIDS awareness into their lessons



A counsellor should be a friendly person with whom students can feel comfortable enough to share their issues

Building character through counselling

and curricular material.

Peer counselling

Most importantly, Mawanda notes that peer counselling has proved to be an effective means of reaching out to students.

"We let exemplary students offer advice to fellow students sometimes, especially when it comes to issues such as peer pressure," Mawanda says.

According to Jacoby, parents, teachers and students can refer a student to the counsellor if they feel that the child needs social or emotional support. Sometimes, having a trusted person from outside your family and teachers can be the support a student or parent needs to deal with personal issues.

Jacoby says a child who needs counselling can be identified by citing a change in their demeanor.

"Students, parents and teachers can usually observe the changes in a child's behaviour or disposition or decline in their grades. Such variations are often a sign that the student is stressed and, therefore, might need counselling," Jacoby says.

She also explains that sometimes a child who has experienced a family tragedy may require counselling to cope.

ENSURE THAT COUNSELLING SERVICES ARE FUNCTIONAL FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL LEARNERS WHO NEED THEM BECAUSE A HEALTHY MIND IS CRITICAL FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING



If the issue is related to friendship groups, Jacoby says the counsellor will enrol all the students involved on the programme.

Jacoby says by working with students in their classes, the counsellor also gets the opportunity to develop relationships with students to help them feel more comfortable reaching out to him or her whenever they feel the need to talk to someone.

College Counsellor

In addition to social and emotional counselling, ISU has a college counsellor, who works with their older students. The counsellors guide the students through the process of selecting universities that are fit for them around the world. They then guide the learners through the application process, which varies from country to country. She explains that

the transition from the supportive secondary school environment to the more independent post-secondary options can be a daunting experience.

The university counsellor provides university guidance and career counselling to students from grades 9-12. During Grade 10, students engage in a week-long job shadowing experience, during which they are placed on a job with a willing

sponsor.

The opportunity gives them hands-on experience in a field they may be interested in pursuing as a career.

Students have been placed in a variety of professional fields, including education, medicine, engineering, advertising and marketing.

"This kind of guidance enables children to choose careers that they truly love and are able to do," says Jacoby.

Mawanda says the significance of counselling in academics cannot be underestimated. As such, he urges schools to ensure that counselling services are functional for the benefit of all learners who need them, saying a healthy mind is critical for effective learning.

Sam Turya, a director at Kabojja International School says that counselling is one of the pillars of comforting learners.

He says since learners come from different backgrounds, counselling is crucial.

"Through counselling, we get to harmonise the learners to enable them to cope with the multi-cultural setting," Turya says.

Indiscipline

Apart from harmonising culture, Turya says counselling is also key to promoting discipline.

"Before we condemn indiscipline, we usually give a listening ear," Turya says.

George William Semivule, an educationist, says counselling is an important service in education.

"It improves the learners' confidence and academic competence," he says.

According to Semivule, more often than not, students have problems and concerns that require intervention. He says in such cases, they need a person to guide them.

He says that for counseling to be effective, it has to be structured.

"Schools must have a special private room where students can meet counsellors," advises Semivule.

He notes that privacy and confidentiality are key for counselling.

"Some of the teenagers do not want their peers to know that they are grappling with some issues, so confidentiality is vital," says Semivule.

He further notes that the school counsellors should be friendly people, with whom students can feel comfortable enough to share their issues without fear of being criticised or judged.

Semivule adds that the counsellors may not necessarily be teachers in the school, but he stresses that they should be equipped with the skills to help children cope with both their social life and academic issues.



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For hands-on education, go international

By Prisca Baike

As a Chinese proverb suggests, people forget what they are taught, sometimes remember what they are shown, but they surely never forget what they get involved with. As far as education goes, the international curriculum is highly credited for its experiential hands-on learning that it offers its students.

Practical education

The international curriculum proponents argue that the international curriculum fosters understanding rather than cramming. This way, the students don't forget what they learn.

The local curriculum has been criticised for encouraging cramming, with no practical teaching for their learners.

Robert Ntale, whose two children attend an international school, says he chose the international curriculum because of the weaknesses in the local curriculum.

"The current Ugandan curriculum is not bad per



The students in one of their practical lessons at the robotix club

THE INTERNATIONAL CURRICULUM PROPONENTS ARGUE THAT THE INTERNATIONAL CURRICULUM FOSTERS UNDERSTANDING RATHER THAN CRAMMING.

say, but it is just poorly implemented," Ntale says. He notes that the curriculum encourages children to cram and reproduce what they are

taught simply to pass exams without really knowing how to apply what they are taught. This, he says, is not the case with the international

curriculum, which is more practical. He says that the international curriculum emphasizes the applicability of knowledge which is the true essence of learning.

"Children in international schools are given various projects to work on which sharpens their minds and prepares them for the field," Ntale says

Gaining ground

Stephen Mawanda, the head of admissions at Aga Khan says there has been an upsurge in the enrolment rates as more parents embrace the international curriculum

He explains that what used to be a reserve for only expatriates and the affluent is now fast becoming a viable option for quite a number of middle class parents who wish their children to receive international education.

Mawanda says, the international curriculum, is based on the premise of a global mindset. He says children who go through this kind of curriculum are innovative, dynamic and easily adapt to multi-cultural settings.

Mawanda elucidates that the international curriculum fosters critical thinking and problem-solving.

Ntale notes that since international schools have state-of-the-art facilities, their students are exposed to practical lessons, which promote hands-on and experiential learning.

He also explains that since the children are fewer in number, there is a lower student-teacher ratio, which in turn improves learning outcomes.

The few numbers aside, other international curriculums, such as the Accelerated Christian Education curriculum, provide for individualised learning, which enables a teacher to identify and address a student's weaknesses.

Emmanuel Mwesigwa, the director, Shoma Christian Academy, one of the schools using the curriculum, says its philosophy of individualised learning enables children to learn at their own pace without feeling pressurised to catch up with their colleagues who are much faster.

"In the same way, the faster students are not held back by their colleagues who need more time," says Mwesigwa, noting that every child has unique abilities and this curriculum aims at nurturing every student's ability

Although her children are doing the local curriculum, Brenda Namusoke, a social worker also finds the international curriculum much better than the local one.

"If it wasn't for the high tuition, my children would be doing the international curriculum," says Namusoke.

The local curriculum, according to Namusoke, overloads children with subjects and topics that may not really be necessary for their dream career.

Retired former Mengo Senior School headteacher, George William Semivule, also shares Namusoke's sentiments. Semivule wonders why a student should study around 20 subjects in Senior One only to drop them to only eight in two years.

Semivule maintains that there is nothing wrong with the local curriculum. The problem, he says lies in its wrong implementation.

Commercialisation

"Due to the commercialisation of education, many teachers are teaching students to pass exams rather than to understand, thus the cramming and exam malpractices," Semivule says.

Grace Baguma, the executive director National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) also agrees that the local curriculum is just wrongly delivered to the learners.

She notes that the international and local curriculum cannot be measured against each other since they are both designed with different goals and targets.

She points out that the curriculums are not static and are continuously revised from time to time to keep them relevant. And it is against this background that the Ugandan curriculum is being revised.

"Some issues were raised regarding the curriculum and we are working to address them," she says, noting that the new curriculum will be more practical and centered on innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving.

He says just because some parents are opting for the international curriculum does not mean that the local curriculum is bad.

Semivule further notes that the growing consumption of the international curriculum is a result of the emerging middle income class in the country.

Although more parents are increasingly opting for the international curriculum, he advises parents to ensure that their children don't lose their traditional ties and true native identity which most often get lost in the multi-cultural international school set up. To this effect, Mawanda notes that despite being international schools, there are activities that are geared towards grounding children in their culture and tradition.

"We encourage our children to respect each other's culture if they are to be good global citizens. Mawanda also explains that the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) awarded by Aga Khan and other international schools is the most popular secondary school qualification that is internationally trusted.

"This makes our students marketable," he says adding that the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma programme which they take their students through in their final high school years (grade 12 and 13), vigorously prepares them for university.

He explains that under the programme, their students are introduced to research and report writing which adequately prepares them for university way ahead of their peers pursuing the local curriculum.

Although the local curriculum is good and is undertaken by majority of Ugandans due to its affordability, experts maintain that the international curriculum gives value for money as students gain hands-on experiential learning which aptly prepares them for the job market.

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