

Teaching & Learning

FROM THE EDITOR



Search for value for your money

Last year when the Education ministry closed Bridge International schools, the debate on standards in private schools was opened. In her statement to Parliament on August 9, 2016, Janet Museveni, the Minister of Education and Sports, indicated that the materials (iPad lesson plans) pupils were taught with cannot promote teacher-pupil interaction.

A ministry report also showed the schools had poor hygiene and sanitation, which put health and safety of the children in danger. If you have a child in a private school, you should ensure their school meets the right education standards as stipulated by the Education Act.

This way, you will be sure your child gets holistic education. Besides, you will not be worried about closure by government. Despite private schools enhancing the education sector, they must be regulated. Issues of frequent school fees increment, education standards, safety and health of learners in these schools should not be ignored. Our issue today looks at these and gives guidelines on how to identify the best private school for your child.

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Expert take

ISMAIL MULINDWA, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER PRIVATE SCHOOLS

"Government has not really built the capacity to manage a school where and when it is needed. The private sector bridges this gap and that is why many private schools are sprouting. However, there must be an authority to control, regulate and coordinate their operations. The Education ministry has specific guidelines on establishment of private, which guide on how schools should be started, when, where and by who. These must be followed."



The allure of private schools

Aside from bridging the education gap for the ever increasing population, private schools create jobs for surplus teachers who cannot be absorbed in government institutions.

BY GODFREY LUGAJJU
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The demand for private schools is rising even when the government offers free primary and secondary school education. Despite presence of Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE), privately owned schools continue to offer a competitive alternative.

But it is not a Ugandan case alone. Private schools are also becoming more common around the world. According to UN report, the portion of primary school students enrolled in non-government schools globally stood at 16 per cent in 2000. It had risen to 20 per cent by 2009.

Thwaib Nsereko, a parent at St Paul Secondary School, a private school in Kireka, Wakiso District, says sometimes, the closest government school is of low academic standard as evidenced by the quality of teachers, condition of the school infrastructure and students' performance in exams.

"If a child intends to join university, they must attend a school with high academic standards. Therefore, the family might decide to send their child to a school they are sure will guarantee this. As is the case in the country today, there are high chances that that school will be privately owned," he says.

Infrastructure question

Often, government schools are criticised for high numbers of learners, which make it difficult for teachers to attend closely to all pupils. This,



Pupils walk to class at a private school in Kampala recently. Good infrastructure is one of the reasons, parents choose private school over most government aided ones. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

Classes

Private schools started operating as far back as the 1950s and the many government schools we see today such as Kisubi Secondary School, Mengo Senior School, Ndejje Secondary School, Kibuli Secondary School and Mt. St. Mary's College, Namagunga, among others were originally private institutions. These are also classified under faith-based schools such as Bugema Adventists Secondary School, Seroma Christian High School and Gombe Secondary School, among others and secular schools such as Old Kampala Secondary School, St Mark's College, Namagunga among others.

in turn, affects performance of the students in national examinations.

Stella Nandegge, a parent at Gayaza Road Secondary School in Kyebando, Wakiso District, says most government-run schools have more than 60 pupils per stream. Occasionally, she says, a class may not even have a teacher at all. "We have seen where pupils in some rural government schools study under trees. In such a case, what would stop one from enrolling their child in a private school that has better infrastructure? As a parent, you must be wary about your child's welfare at school and get out of your way to ensure they get a good education," she said.

She adds: "Private schools have set a trend in infrastructural advancement in most of their institutions.

It is one thing to have infrastructure and another to have functional infrastructure. Most government schools structures are abandoned with no equipment. It is such flaws that make the establishment of privately owned schools inevitable.

Alternative employment

Originally, teachers would be employed in government and private schools. Considering their numbers, there would be surplus of teachers looking for employment. Today, if they get one with a private school,

Allan Mbidde, the head teacher of Uphill Secondary School, a private school in Luteete, says the existence of private schools helps teachers produced by the various universities and teacher training colleges to get jobs.

"With the many teachers graduating every year, a big number of them would be left unemployed as there are only a few government schools. This means that a lot of expertise would be left roaming. It is initiatives such as starting up private institutions that can absorb them and utilise their potential," he notes.

Mbidde adds that the competition posed by private schools prompts government schools to become competitive. "Private schools forced government institutions out of their comfort zone in a bid to ensure quality education making them a driving force to better education standards in the country," he explains.

Regulation

According to Ismail Mulindwa, the assistant commissioner private schools in the Education ministry, despite mushrooming private schools, there must be an authority to control, regulate and coordinate their operations.

"The Education Act is clear about the Education ministry being responsible for coordinating, regulating and controlling education institutions in this country. We have specific guidelines, for example, on establishment of these schools but we have that big framework (the Act) which guides on how schools should be started, when where and by who and this is the framework that guides. However, it has got provisions," he says.

He says they (Ministry) are trying to come up with a specific policy on private schools because the Act is general (it looks at pre-primary, primary, secondary and universities both private and government).

"We have specific policies for specific areas or programmes such as licensing and registration. It is not the only thing we do with private schools. It is just one of the many things we do in there to guide the stakeholders on how to go about this. There are no specific frameworks for private schools per se. It is one general framework that caters for both private and government schools," Mulindwa explains.

IMPROVED FUNDING

In the 2016/17 Financial Year, the education sector was allocated Shs2.44 trillion. This 2017/18 Financial Year it has been allocated 2.5 trillion. This shows government is dedicated to improving education in the country

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PERCENTAGE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS ENROLLED IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS GLOBALLY IN 2009, ACCORDING TO A UN REPORT.

Credit crunch: Private schools struggling to remain afloat



The cost of living is arguably getting higher affecting, among others, daily cost of running privately owned schools.

ON THE COVER

To the contrary, Paul Ssesanga, who was the owner of the school, says he has found a new manager and claims to have cleared the debt he owed the money lender. "I paid in excess of the debt and want a refund of some of the money," Ssesanga says. "It is a matter before court. After the judgment, we shall know who the right owner of the land is. Whatever is happening will be sorted in court."

Ntinda View College in Kulambiho has not opened since January. According to Mukulu, "teachers who have not been paid for more than a year are selling school equipment such as beds, tables, chairs, and computers to get money for food. The teachers also sued the school owner in court over non-payment of salaries."

Higenyi Jala Mwenepesa, the owner of the school, says, "Although the school was closed, I am in the process of rebranding and restoring the school so that it can be op-

erational again very soon." Some private schools end their terms before the official closure recommended by the Education ministry to reduce cost of feeding students to the end of the term.

Ssesanga says, "Since some school owners do not have enough funding to feed the children especially as the term ends, the children, are sent home before the actual term ends and only return to pick their report cards."

David Ssemwogerere, the director of Suubi Secondary and Vocational College in Lwengo District, agrees that the cost of living has risen and there are financial constraints in nearly all educational institutions.

Back to barter trade

"However, as school administrators and proprietors, we have to devise ways to reduce costs to make education affordable while facilitating the running of the schools in sustainable ways," he says. "It is the reason we accept items such as eggs as a form of school fees payment. We also equip students with simple farming skills and where possible, help them rear animals such as pigs and kroiler chicken. That way, they can contribute to their educational costs."

Although private schools are known to offer good education, some have under-qualified teachers that

For private schools to keep operational in these hard financial times, they must devise means of increasing their income.

PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

WHAT HE SAYS

Seek board advice

In such a financial crisis, school owners must have a good working relationship with their employees other than just keeping quiet. The school owner should call for a committee meeting including the school board of governors to let them understand what is happening. Here, they will collectively advise probably to increase school fees."

DR JOHN CHRYSOSTOM MUYINGO, STATE MINISTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION



are also underpaid because of limited funds.

Ssesanga otherwise agrees that school fees should be regulated. "Some schools charge high fees and others low yet they are all private schools. The ones with a low fees structure struggles to operate because they have the low income parents in mind even when it is a business," he explains.

Dr John Chrysostom Muyingo, the State Minister for Higher Education, highlights that there are many private schools operating below minimum education standards. He says some do not have licenses, lack qualified staff and are operating in sub-standard structures, which puts students at risk.

Several private schools have devised means of sustaining themselves in business including increasing school fees. However, Dr Muyingo says, "It is not right for school owners to increase school fees anyhow. It must be through a procedure where the school board of governors is summoned to discuss the need, then sending written notification to the permanent secretary at the Education ministry giving the reason for

To open up a school

According to the April 2013 guidelines for establishing private schools/institutions, any member of the public or organisation can open up a school or institution provided they meet the minimum requirements as stipulated by the Education ministry.

- Dr John Chrysostom Muyingo, State Minister for Higher Education, warns that the person should be of good reputation, get recommendation letters from local council persons. The intended school owner should have evidence of land ownership or agreements of renting the property.

- There must be enough land for expansion, playgrounds, kitchen, toilets, laboratory, school garden and physical education.

- The intending proprietor writes to the Education ministry permanent secretary asking for a licence.

- The intended owner must have enough money on their bank account, qualified staff and management enough structures in terms of buildings, furniture, the guidelines read in part.

- Upon approval, an operational licence is awarded to the school for last two school years but must be renewed six months before expiry. Licence and registration of schools is free.

increasing school fees."

Probable solutions

- Raising school fees alone may not help if the money does not come in on time. The school management can also embark on having students pay their school fees promptly, probably in the first week of their arrival from holidays. This will enable the school to cater for the expenses on time.

- High student numbers can be a solution therefore, private schools can make as much publicity because these numbers can translate into income for the schools.

- The school owners can seek for aid from international donors through proposals or allow other people to have shares in the school so the school is co-owned.

- Owning a private school is a business where one must invest heavily first, before they can reap from it. "Private school owners, according to Dr Muyingo, "Must have a reliable source of income even before they start the venture. This way, they will be able to hire qualified staff, and feed their students."

- Dr Muyingo adds, "Having ample space at the school will provide space for a school garden from which food may be able to supplement the school feeding on occasional days."

- He further says, "The Ministry has tasked a committee led by Prof Frederick Kanyanja to study the fees structures of both private and government schools and will come up with a regulation on the minimum amount of school fees to protect the interest of the public."



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