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Society is changing, is your classroom keeping pace?

Experts emphasise that education must evolve alongside society. If it does not, they warn, schools risk preparing learners for a world that no longer exists.

BY SYLVIA KATUSHABE

A recent confrontation between a parent and a school in Kampala has reignited debate over whether classroom teaching and assessment reflect the realities of modern family life.

The incident involved a single mother who stormed into a school after her daughter's answer was marked wrong on a test.

The question asked: Who heads a family? The child answered "mother." The teacher marked it wrong.

The teacher explained that the correct answer was "father," based on traditional societal roles. This infuriated the parent, who said she is the sole provider and head of her household.

"My daughter has never seen another head of our family," she argued. As family structures continue to evolve across Uganda, the education sector faces increasing pressure to ensure that classroom teaching reflects the diversity of learners' lives. Otherwise, education experts warn, more simple test questions will turn into real-world conflicts.

A growing disconnect

Education experts say this dispute highlights a growing disconnect between the national curriculum and changing social dynamics.

John Bosco Mutebi, head teacher of Silver Spoon Primary School in Kibuli, Kampala, says many schools are abandoning rigid questions like these to avoid emotionally affecting learners and their parents or guardians from diverse family backgrounds.

"We no longer ask such questions," Mutebi says. "Today, some families are headed by mothers, others by fathers alone, others by children, and others by guardians."

Instead, Mutebi explains, schools are reframing how they assess learners on family-related topics.

When the curriculum lags behind

Mutebi acknowledges that the national curriculum still contains traditional concepts about family roles. However, he says schools are adapting their practices to reflect current societal realities.

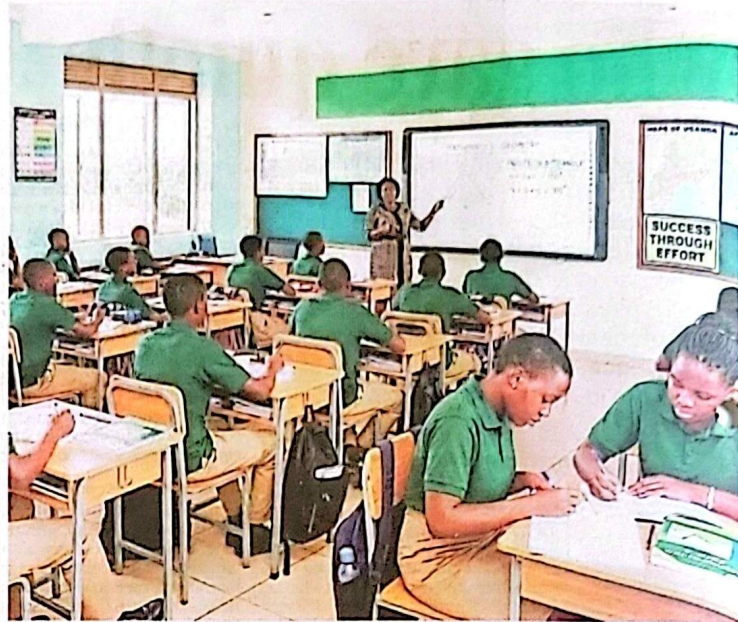
"The curriculum has not changed. If you look at it, those traditional ideas are still there," he admits. "But the trends have changed. In social studies, you must go with the trends. Otherwise, if you simply set questions anyhow, you can cause an uproar in society."

At his school, every examination paper goes through a rigorous review process before reaching learners.

"We modulate those papers cautiously," Mutebi explains. "They start with the teacher, then go to the head of department, then the deputy head teacher, and finally to the head teacher for approval. Only then do we accept that the paper is properly set."

He says this review process ensures questions are relevant and sensitive to learners' lived experiences.

"You have to ask yourself:



Society has significantly evolved, with major changes in family structure, technology, and social roles. PHOTO/FILE.

Does this question speak to current society? Or are you just being conservative? If you are that type, you will have problems with parents," he warns.

The problem is not the curriculum

Amon Kansime, head teacher of Ebenezer Primary School in Kisugu, Kampala, emphasises that schools should desist from setting opinion-based questions on sensitive topics. He notes that most schools have stopped asking ambiguous questions such as Who pays school fees? or Who is responsible for cooking food? Questions that assume traditional gender roles that no longer reflect society's diversity.

"Traditionally, a father was the caretaker who provided everything," Kansime says. "But now, with the dynamics of this world, a father can play a motherly role and a mother can play a fatherly role, depending on the family."

He adds: "We have families headed by mothers. So when you ask who heads a family, and the learner answers 'mother,' they are correct because their family is headed by a mother."

Kansime argues that teachers who still ask rigid, traditional questions are locked in old traditions and have failed to cope with current societal changes.

"It is not an issue of the curricu-

WORD FROM NCDC MINING CODE

Bernadette Nambi Karuhanga, Executive Director of the National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC), explains that the issue is not with the curriculum itself but with teachers who have not moved with the trends. "We do not have such questions in the curriculum, that the head of a family must be the father," she states firmly. "A teacher asking such a question in this age and era must be having a problem."

Amon Kansime urges teachers to continuously update their teaching approaches to match the realities of today's society. He explains that society has significantly evolved, with major changes in family structure, technology, and social roles.

"Teachers must regularly review and update their teaching materials to remove questions and assumptions that no longer reflect real-life situations," Kansime says.

lum," he insists. "The problem is the teacher who is not moving with the trends."

Teachers must keep updating

Halima Kirabira, a teacher in Kampala, emphasises that teachers must follow current trends rather than locking themselves in old traditions. Although society and family structures have changed significantly over time, she says some teachers continue teaching learners the old ways.

"As a teacher, you must keep up with the trends. Teach learners what is necessary for their time," Kirabira says. "Teachers must keep themselves updated if they want to remain relevant."

Beyond the nuclear family

Mutebi points out that some learners come from highly complex or non-traditional family arrangements. These include children raised by single parents, guardians, adoptive parents, or even institutional systems such as trusts set up to manage their welfare.

"In some cases, a parent passes away and leaves a trust to take care of the child, including paying school fees," he explains. "So when you ask 'Who pays school fees?' what answer do you expect?"

However, Mutebi acknowledges efforts by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEBC) to align assessments with modern realities, even when the official curriculum has not been fully updated.