



A teacher guiding students in class. It is important to inquire about the teachers' behaviour when choosing a school for your child

Why a good environment is essential to learning

By Geoffrey Mutegeki

Schools are about to open and, as a responsible parent, you should make sure your child is in the right learning environment.

Senior One students will join school in a couple of weeks, but is that new environment good for your child?

According to John Agaba, a former commissioner of secondary education, although the education ministry sets the minimum standards for schools to operate, as a parent, "You need to make your own preferences of the environment your child should study under."

Not all schools in Uganda meet the minimum standards. Many have condemned structures, among others, and lack basic facilities, such as latrines, water and sports facilities.

According to Ismail Mulengwa, a parent from Ntinda, a Kampala suburb, security and safety measures at school are some of the key factors to consider in making the learning environment conducive.

"If it is a boarding school, the school should have safety equipment, like lightning conductors, enough space for learners to play, first aid facilities and fire extinguishers in dormitories. A fence around the school should also be a consideration," Mulengwa says.

To Roselyn Oketcho, another parent, the school neighbourhood is one of the factors she would consider while choosing a school for the child.

She explains that she wouldn't want to have her children go to a school which is in a crowded place, where learning is likely to be disrupted.

"I would prefer a school with spacious compounds and fresh environs where I am sure my child can have refreshing moments. A



The compound Hillside Primary School, Nalya. A good environment at school is good for the pupils learning

crowded school can be stressful and I wouldn't want to have my children in such a stressing environment," Oketcho says.

Because schools groom and develop talents, Richard Alitua, a retired headteacher, says parents should consider schools with facilities for co-curricular activities.

"The right schooling environment should have playgrounds, indoor game facilities where children can relax their minds, work on their physical fitness, and have a moment to work on their talents,"

According to Tony Bates, the former executive vice-president of Microsoft, a teacher's job is not to do the learning for the student, but to create an environment that facilitates the kind of learning that will benefit the learner.

"Any learning environment is much more than the

technology used to support it. It is not a question of pouring knowledge into a student's head, but enabling the learner to develop concepts, think critically, and apply and evaluate what they have learned, by providing a conducive learning environment for them," Bates says in one of his writings.

Considering all the above, parents have a choice to look at the facilities at the school, inquire about the teachers' behaviour, know the school's values and culture before making a decision of taking their children to that school.

"I would encourage parents to visit the schools before rushing to pick admission forms for their children. As a parent, you should know how your child is going to sleep, eat, and study. The school must have learning facilities like a library, laboratories

and chapel which are key to the development of the children Alitua says. It is from this that parent can determine which school is good for their children.

According to Elizabeth F. Barkle a renowned education expert from the UK, an environment where students do not feel accepted or respected is a distraction learning.

A positive learning environment means that a student feels comfortable, has a sense of rapport with their teacher and peers, and believes they can be successful.

School environments are extremely important for students and teachers. Everything from the compound, classrooms and the arrangement of the desks in the classroom all send impressions to students and can affect the way they learn.

Boarding schools

For parents planning to take their children to boarding school, there are specific requirements set by the education ministry, especially dormitories.

OTHER FACTORS

Parents should consider facilities for co-curricular activities when choosing a school for their children.