

ents are often faced with the
ing their children to faith-based
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BY CHRISTINE KASEMIRE
editorial@bug.nationmedia.com

How religious, secular schools affect children

Mr Godfrey Kiggundu, a parent of Grace Education Centre in Nakasongola, says children listen more to their teachers than parents.

"Often, they will dispute your opinion as a parent and say but teacher said we do this," he elaborates.

That is why he believes the school a child goes to shapes them into the person you want them to be in future.

Religious schools are education centres grounded on a particular religious affiliation that will affect its actions such as Islamic, Catholic, Anglican and Seventh Day Adventist schools.

Founded from a religious background, these schools raise a child spiritually in the school's attributed faith. Prayers are part of their curriculum to which the administration works hard to enforce.

Basemera Maryursula, a Senior Six student at Our Lady of Africa Rubaga Girls Secondary School, a Catholic-church founded school, reveals that as part of their non-examinable subjects, moral education and alpha classes are in their curriculum to instill religion in them. These are mainly at the foundation of their secondary life (Senior One and Two).

The classes complement the 30 minutes daily prayers they indulge in and on Monday, Tuesday and Sunday, the students attend mass.

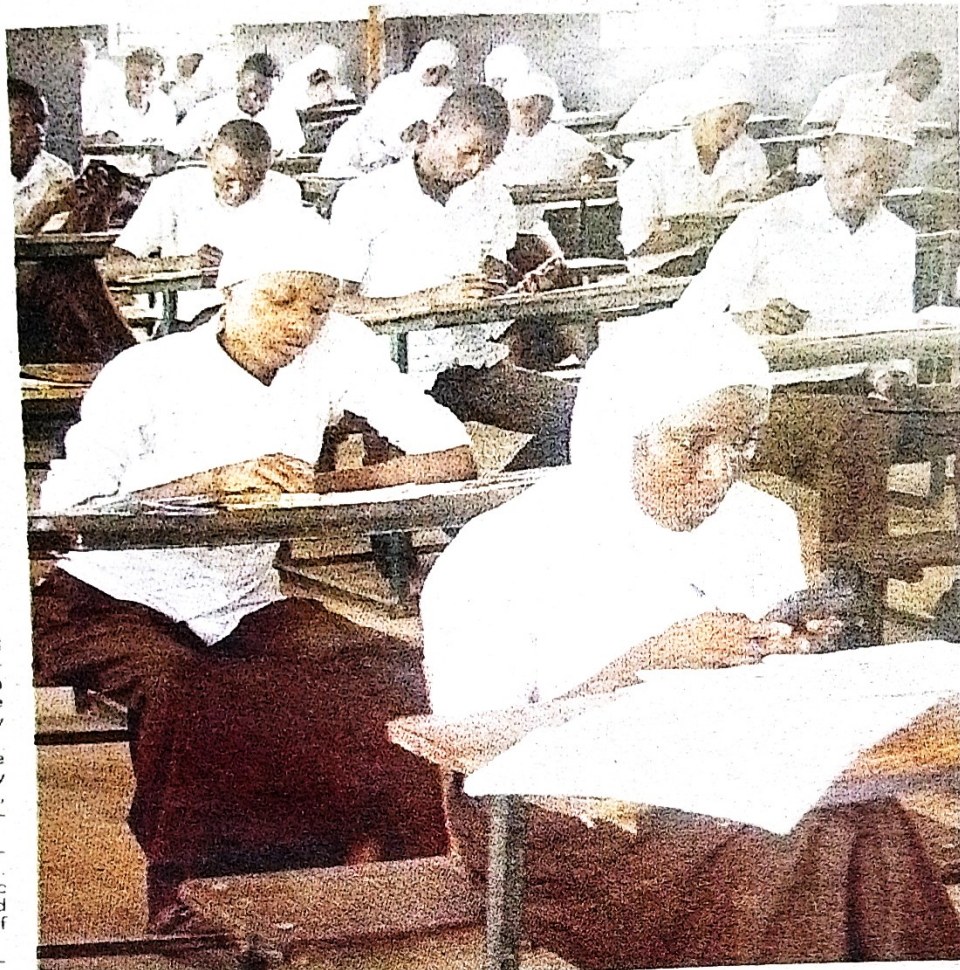
Prayers are one of the humbling components in a religion. The same applies to Islamic schools where prayers and reading the Quran are part of the daily routine.

Mr Issa Senkumba, the director at London High School, an Islamic institution, says religious schools not only focus on academics, but also nourish children's spiritual and cultural aspects of life.

He says unlike home where they will be educated by parents, in their absence, the schools act as substitutes in educating, training and sensitising children on different life realities since in boarding schools, they have a lot of interface time.

"Now that schools are an institutional family, the only uniting factors could be things like religion. When you have students coming together under different faiths, you have no better union than that," he says.

The effect of these schools following the faith rules dictated by the respective holy books, is that the students raised are calm, disciplined and obedient as religion requires them to be.



Advanced Level students of Kakungulu Memorial School in Kibuli during a Mathematics exam. In some Islamic-founded schools, prayers and reading the Quran are part of the daily routine.

FILE PHOTO

Senkumba believes that that is why student strikes are never in their institutions or a product of religious school students.

Religions demarcate right from wrong in their preaching. This way, they guide their followers on what is permissible or not. Rules and regulations are taken with high priority in these schools. A strict code of conduct, uniform and code of dressing throughout all events at the school are of the utmost importance to them.

Despite Rubaga Girls' Secondary School being single sex, the school still requires the girls to wear uniforms and nothing revealing at celebratory events. While shirts and ankle long skirts is the standard uniform allowed at London High, the school permits long sleeves and veils for the Moslems who

wish to do so.

However, despite all action taken to strengthen the children's faith in their religions, counselling from clerics, Mr Senkumba says, it is more of an individual effort as it is the educators' if the child wants to be a responsible and abiding citizen in future.

Secular schools are much to the contrary. Liberal, tolerant, diverse and progressive is what they pride themselves on. They equally make provisions for religion, with a diversity but are not founded on any affiliation and do not put religion first.

Mr Lawrence Kaddu Kasibante, the headmaster of Nakasero Senior School, says the school trades mainly in the academics, but does not neglect religion. He emphasises acquaintance based on a per-

sonality stance.

He says as a school, they concentrate on giving an opportunity to learn different cultures and associate with people from all walks of life. Disagreeing with what religious schools hail, he believes education with a religious affiliation sparks discrimination amongst children, narrows down the community within which a child will associate, which is detrimental to the whole society.

Children from secular schools can fit in anywhere because they have had all experiences.

"In those schools, Christian or Moslem, the child will get biased to what they think is right or wrong, which will influence how they perceive and associate with people, especially those of contrary beliefs," he responds.

As a secular school, he believes they hold school discipline whose disciplinary measures according to what is prescribed. Secular ones do more than caring because they are more liberal, giving them a chance to voice their challenges and opinions.

With little consideration, faith-based repercussions, government finds it easy to implement policies in secular schools that will benefit the child, diversity as Kasibante explains is critical for the young adult about to experience the world.

He, however, admits that in some cases, the freedom from secular schools allows for immorality, especially if not checked. Acts of lesbianism and homosexuality, for instance, stem from too much freedom given to children, he says.

Expert opinion

In his expertise as the head of mental and community psychology at Makerere University, Mayanja Kajumba says parents tend to take children to religious schools so they can attain better morals which to a point is true. He says children from a religious school background tend to have strong morals, better conscience and are less likely to misbehave than their peers from secular schools.

However, with some school administrations in Uganda respecting other religions, the children can carry hatred for other religions. He cites schools that enroll children from different affiliations without prior knowledge that they are of different faiths, but upon admission, force the students to commit to the school's beliefs and actions.

High chances of radicalisation is a risk associated with religious schools. Much as parents wish to raise a strong spiritual and moral child, Dr Kajumba believes they should be keen to keep the religion in sync with world experiences.

Children from secular schools, he says, are less likely to have a strict approach to life. He believes there should also be diversity and are quickly introduced to reality. Contrary to secular schools, at a point where children are old enough to understand relations with the opposite sex, religious institutions discourage them, even as inevitable.

This is why, he says, lesbianism and homosexuality are dominant in single sex religious schools.