

Breaking monotony of classwork

Sometimes, classroom teaching becomes monotonous and routine thereby calling for co-curricular activities such as quizzes, debate competitions through which students learn on their own.

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All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" is a common proverb used to refer to working without engaging in any leisure activities. In schools for example, students who engage in co-curricular activities discover their interests and talents while developing values and competencies that will prepare them for a rapidly changing world.

Co-curricular activities include debate competitions, quizzes, science fairs, career fairs, student newspapers, musical performances, art shows, mock trials, and mathematics, robotics, engineering teams and contests among others.

There is an argument about failure of some schools to draw a line between co-curricular activities and academics.

But Moreen Nakidde, a choir administrator at Kennedy Secondary School in Entebbe, refutes this saying co-curricular activities can never surpass classwork because at the end of the day it is the core reason students go to school and there is no way a school can sit on the talents of students.

"I believe all students are gifted differently. One child's calling can be academics and the other singing. As a school, we always plan the timetable accordingly to cater for both kinds of students," she explains.

Angela Kateemu, a communication specialist, says she developed her writing ability from her days as a participant in reading competitions in the Literature club at Bwerayangi Girls Secondary School in Bushenyi. "We would organise reading activities where we would meet and ensure we read a certain number of pages of a given book. We would also write short stories which our patron - a teacher, would mark. This was entirely to encourage us to read and write which was our passion," she says.

Kateemu who spent the first 10 years of her career as a journalist says had it not been for her participation in writing then, she would not have registered the success she has achieved as a writer.

Strike a balance

Sometimes schools as well as students fail to strike a balance between classwork and co-curricular activities. But Nakidde says no school can go overboard in implementing the core principals of the ministry of Education regarding co-curricular activities and syllabus coverage since the ministry reserves the right to monitor, control and regulate school activities.

"The school timetable is always there to guide. We at times have trips upcountry for our students to sing for instance but we work in line with our syllabus coverage to ensure that students do not miss out on any topic," she says.

Kateemu and her friends say they would read novels under the desks while a teacher is in class in order to beat their deadline. "Although I learnt how to compete and achieve a goal I have set, I most times got into trouble with teachers who would catch me reading a novel during lessons. Striking a balance between co-curricular activities, though important is sometimes not easy," she says.

But Aloysius Lubwama, the head teacher Fountain Academy Nsangi, says co-curricular activities are acknowledged by the ministry of education. "What people fail to understand is that these activities play a major role in building the learner's confidence since learners express themselves better in their small forums," he says.

For instance Hanifa Lukenge, a parent, says she expected the school to concentrate on studies but was disappointed with their hype on co-curricular activities.

"My daughter brings me certificates of participation in the various fields such as MDD when her books are missing some notes saying they are always practicing," she says.

But Lubwama says it is failure of some schools to streamline their programmes well to balance the two that makes people think that co-curricular activities are becoming an all play and no work for students.

According to Ismail Mulindwa the assistant commissioner Private Schools Department in the ministry of Education and Sports, the complaint has been that students are inclined in books and do not get time for co-curricular activities. "I do not see any problem with schools engaging in co-curricular activities. Incidentally, schools which engage in these activities are usually the academic giants in the country, meaning it is just a matter of balancing the two," he says.



EXTRA COST

Sometimes participation in co-curricular activities comes at an additional cost to parents. If a school is launching a music album for instance, they may ask parents to fund it. Students may also ask parents for money to buy equipment for a science fair. According to Fredrick Kityamuwesi, the games and sports master at Cambridge College, Kyengera, although most schools allow students to participate in co-curricular activities, some have turned them into a get rich scheme.

"You find a school making all children and parents subscribe a certain fee for the school choir and quiz projects. I believe these should solely be school arrangements to enhance learning and not a rip off of parents," he says.

Students need to engage in activities that enhance the curriculum outside the classroom. PHOTO BY ALEX ESAGALA

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