

Community polytechnics are a viable alternative

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Some of the major programmes taught in polytechnics include; plumbing, welding and metal fabrication, home economics and catering, electrical installation and systems maintenance, building and construction, woodwork technology. FILE PHOTO

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By PAUL MURUNGI

The Saturday Monitor of January 24 reported that 130,000 pupils missing out on Senior One selection. The group joins another 66,000 candidates who sat for Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) but were ungraded after failing to score the minimum marks required.

In addition to those are school dropouts who qualified but may not be able to continue due to lack of school fees and other factors.

Fortunately, community polytechnics that are spread across the country are offering a way out for Primary Seven leavers who for one reason or another are not able to join secondary school.

Robert Kirungi from Mubende District who doubles as an electrical engineer and a mason can attest to the importance of polytechnics.

In 2005, Kirungi completed Primary Seven at Bishop West Primary School in Mukono District. He scored 15 aggregates in Primary Leaving Exams but couldn't join secondary school due to lack of school fees. Kirungi tried his luck and joined Mukono Secondary School in 2006 raising fees through odd jobs. Unfortunately after just one year, he dropped out of school because he couldn't keep up with the financial demands.

When he dropped out, a colleague advised him to try his luck with community polytechnics.

Kirungi took the advice seriously and went on to join Gombe Community Polytechnic in Wakiso District. He even managed to be admitted on government sponsorship.

“The administration at Gombe told me I could join using my PLE passlip since I didn't have a Senior Four certificate. I had two vocational courses I was interested in; electrical installation and building construction. I decided to settle for electrical installation,” he intimates.

Kirungi started off with electrical installation at the polytechnic but along the way, he took up shorter course modules in building construction and wood work for six months alongside his three year course. After three years at Gombe Community Polytechnic, Kirungi graduated in 2010.

With three certificates, Kirungi set himself apart in the world of vocational work and has since established himself in Mubende District as a competent resource.

Polytechnics

Patrick Bagalana, the head instructor at Sanje Community Polytechnic, Kyotera Rakai District describes community polytechnics as government institutions which were established in 2002 to take the bulge of Universal Primary Education (UPE) primary seven leavers which was rising at the time.

He says these are community owned and were originally established to provide vocational skills to Primary Seven leavers. However, this has expanded to include Senior Four leavers on private basis. According to Bagalana, the polytechnics have three course levels.

Level one

The first level is skilling. He says, for this level, anyone is admitted. No qualifications are required. Usually, such courses are sponsored by government.

“The courses range between three to 12 months. You can join with or without qualifications, and choose a course of your own choice. Government pays Shs250, 000, per term for this level,” Bagalana says.

Under skilling, Bagalana notes that students are trained in modules. He explains that the modules are extracted from a topic from a given course.

“An example is in tailoring where we teach garment construction and design. In this case, we can decide to pick just one module on how to make a shirt. We teach people a skill on how to make a shirt for three months and subject them to a Directorate of Industrial Training examination,” Bagalana says.

Level two

Bagalana says this is the Community Polytechnic Certificate of Education (CPCE) level for primary leavers. Previously, it was called junior certificate level, when polytechnic education was examined under Uganda National Examinations Board (Uneb).

However, in 2011, it was transferred and is now examined under Uteb. Bagalana explains that this level is for Primary Seven leavers who score aggregate four to 33. Government usually offers sponsorship for students with aggregate four to 28. The CPCE level takes three years and they are examined by Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board.

“Under CPCE, a student is entitled to a full course curriculum,” he says, adding that it’s possible to pursue both CPCE and skilling level at the same time since the latter takes a shorter period of time.

According to Robert Byekwaso, the head instructor at Gombe Community Polytechnic in Wakiso District, the CPCE certificate is equivalent to an O-Level certificate. He says during the course of training, students are trained in Mathematics, English and Entrepreneurship.

“These are studied to enable students compete favourably on the job market. Some people think that technicians are academic failures who do not know English and Mathematics. But the new curriculum which was rolled out in 2011 and which is being implemented considered all these,” he stresses.

Level three

Bagalana, this level is for O-Level students. The National Certificate level takes two years and is examined by UBTEB every year.

Courses

Some of the major programmes taught in polytechnics include; plumbing, welding and metal fabrication, home economics and catering, electrical installation and systems maintenance, building and construction, woodwork technology, and other minor courses such as entrepreneurship.