



Staff of Kiira Motors doing welding practical interviews before being awarded certificates at Lugoo Vocational Training Institute.

Why vocational education should be your child's choice

By Geoffrey Mutegeki

Ritah Nakimuli finished Primary Seven (P7) in 2007 at Kyoganyi Primary School. Instead of joining secondary school, Nakimuli opted for vocational training and currently owns a garage in Mityana district.

Currently, Nakimuli is pursuing a diploma in motor vehicle engineering at Buganda Royal Institute.

"I decided not to go to secondary school because I wanted to acquire skills and I loved being a mechanic. Going to secondary school would not allow me get a chance to attain these skills," Nakimuli says.

Inspired by the urge to work in big automobile companies such as Toyota and Nissan, she notes that majority of the students join secondary school with little knowledge of what awaits them.

"The advantage of vocational education is that you study while, on the job, compared to secondary school where you finish four or six years without any skill or knowing your future career," Nakimuli says.

She adds that even when misfortunes like losing a parent or lack of school fees happen, when you are in vocational school, you can easily make it with the skills attained.

"When I lost my father in 2012, I was not so much affected since I had skills and was earning money to pay my school fees."

Her journey as mechanic started at Kikaya Vocation School, Bulenga, where she attained a junior certificate in motor vehicle in 2011 and a certificate in motor vehicle in 2013.

"After attaining these certificates, I started my own garage in Mityana, called Bukokolo Service Garage."

BETWEEN THE LINES: Value of vocational education

■ The Commissioner Business Technical Vocational Education Training Joseph Kikomeko notes that, vocational education is no longer an alternative. People need to be shown the value and future of vocational education.

After three years of working, she decided to go back to school and joined St Theresia Vocational Institute-Zigoti for an Advanced Certificate in motor vehicle mechanics.

According to the Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board (UBTEB) executive secretary, Onesmus Oyesigye, much as the country grapples with high levels of unemployment, 60% are unemployed due to lack of competence in their fields of study.

He said learners assessed by UBTEB and attained competence levels of above 50% in all course units easily understood concepts, making them competitive in the job market.

The commissioner Business Technical Vocational Education Training (BTVET), Joseph Kikomeko, notes that as Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) are released, it is better for parents to highly think of having their children join vocational schools.

"Vocational education is no longer an alternative but the right choice. People are waking up and the bad perception about vocation education is changing, though at a very slow pace," Kikomeko says.

Unlike in the past, it is now possible for one to join a polytechnic after P7 and upgrade to university for an award of a degree.

According to Uganda's education

system, P7 leavers can either proceed to low secondary school or go for a three-year craftsman training offered in farm and technical schools, as well as vocational training centres.

To qualify for vocational school, one must have attained grades 1, 2, 3 and 4 or its equivalent in PLE.

This is the same requirement as for secondary schools, where the maximum score is aggregate 28.

"People need to be shown the value and future of vocational education. Vocation education should not be seen as a pathway for those who have not performed well.

This perception should stop," Kikomeko added.

Currently, the Government is offering free vocational training in over 40 technical and vocational institutes across the country. Of these, 16 are community polytechnic and 25 technical schools.

The Assistant Commissioner Vocational Education, James Mugerwa, explains that vocational schools combine technical and academic learning.

He says vocational education has more advantages compared to secondary education and encourages parents to consider vocation education as the first choice.

"In this era and age, it is wrong to think that secondary education

is the only way to go. Students who join vocational institutes are sure of getting employment as soon as they complete school. They also get hands-on skills," Mugerwa says.

Vocations for the low performers

As examinations are coming out, a number of pupils who may have not excelled academically and are not willing to resist the exams could still join Non-formal Training Programmes (NFTP), according to Mugerwa.

"Pupils who may have not attained aggregate 28 can opt for non-formal training, which is provided by various trainers across the country," he adds.

Mugerwa says there are about 500 government-sponsored trainers offering non-formal training to Ugandans countrywide.

Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of students attending vocational training institutions from 9,189 in 2012 to at least 30,000 in 2017.

About formal polytechnics

The formal community polytechnics schools offer three-year, full-time courses to P7 leavers, leading to the award of Uganda Junior Technical Certificate (UJTC).

According Uganda's education system at secondary level, students will spend four years to get the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE), while at the vocational level, after two to three years, students will graduate with a certificate upon the skills acquired.

It is now possible for students who go to technical or vocational institutions to join universities at some stage in their career if they want.