

There are many dangers with forcing children to do courses they don't like Let your children choose their career paths

When Dr Mukembo crumbled onto the floor of the university room, tears raining freely down his forlorn face, it was not exactly because his son was dead.

Yes, that broke his heart, but what crushed his spirit the more was the fact that he believed Denis had not taken his life. He, Moses Mukembo, had killed his own son. "I killed Denis, Damalie," he said, leaning onto his wife who, together with the hall warden, had lifted him off the floor.

This tragedy had begun close to four years before Denis took his life by hanging. It was time for Denis to choose the subjects he would study at A-level and his desire was that he does arts. His father, himself a social worker, dictated that the boy should pursue sciences, so that he would study architecture on joining the university. "You are good at sciences," he argued, when Denis said he preferred journalism. "But I am also good at the arts, Dad," Denis had said.

But his father was resolute and unrelenting. Ultimately, when the results came back and Denis had excelled at sciences as well as the arts, Dr Mukembo insisted that the boy does a science combination. Eventually, he was driven into pursuing an architecture course at university. But he was not happy, and he made it clear each time he spoke to anybody about the matter. The result was that he took his life, because he could not face his father to tell him that he hated architecture.

It is common for parents to want to have a say in determining the course their children should study at university. They have their own notions of what courses are right, best or practical. They also have courses they believe will lead one to a financially stable and secure job; courses like medicine, law, engineering and so on. This, incidentally, is usually done with the best of intentions, borne of the parental desire for the child to have a "solid" future. The least they desire for their children is that after university, they will not suffer treading the city roads, seeking employment opportunities.

Sometimes parents who insist on their children pursuing specific courses of study at university do so to fulfil their own curtailed dreams. Someone who had dreamed of becoming an accountant, but ended up doing a "less prestigious" course, might push his child into pursuing an accounting course, so that he might ultimately have the profession in the family.

Lately, though, there is another trendy factor that pushes parents into showing their children into specific courses – social media groups. There are forums for old students of all manner of schools; professional groups and family groups. Here, people influence each other and, when one does not have a strong spine on which to base such pertinent decisions as which course their child should study at university or college, they jump onto the group bandwagon. Call it peer influence.

Sometimes, however, some children need the guidance of their parents. In fact, all children need it. It is just that the parent should not dictate what the child should do. However, there are children who are so clueless about the most fundamental things in life that left to their own devices; they will make a total mess of themselves. Such children



Students of Kyambogo University having a discussion. Learners should choose courses which they have interest in other than being forced by parents against their wish. This will not only make them concentrate but also love what they are doing in future



Opinion

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Sometimes, children need the guidance of their parents. In fact, all children need it. But the parent should not dictate what the child should do.

that non-professional courses will be easier to pass, so they go for those.

Apart from those categories, all children should be left to make their own choices. Besides being part of the grooming they need to become independent, responsible and accountable adults, it also helps them do what they are passionate about.

There are cases where, because a parent watches and listens to a child sing from when he wakes up to when he goes to bed, the parent rejoices, saying, 'I have got the next Don Williams or Mariah Carey in the family'. And the moment the child is ready for university, s/he is told, 'Write

Music where it says first choice'. It never crosses their minds that though the child loves music, s/he might be an ardent lover of commerce or business or the humanities. Besides, who says you cannot have an archaeologist who also plays the piano; or a literary giant who conducts plays in a band?

There are many dangers with forcing children to do courses they don't have their hearts into. They will have extremely low motivation, yet an unmotivated person cannot perform well at anything. So in the end, such a student will be a non-performer. If you are lucky, they may choose to change courses along the way, which also has its own problems. Sorry to use the cliché, but don't you know that a rolling stone gathers no moss?

Some parents are so tough, their children dread having discussions with them on anything. So if a child has such a parent, other than face them to say I don't want to do the course you chose for me, they will get into a depression that could prove fatal. Alternatively, they could hold a grudge with the parent that will last until one of them dies.

Talk to employers; they will tell you about many an employee who has no gusto for what he does. He got the much coveted First Class degree, but has no passion. Why? Mummy forced him to do the course, because it pays. So he has a job that pours in the money, but the soul is empty.

The writer is a parent, teacher and counsellor