Choosing the Right School in Kenya: What Are the Benchmarks?

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Abstract
The dynamic nature of the environment in which the education process takes has meant that the education system itself has to be transformed regularly in order to remain relevant and useful to the Kenyan society. Efforts to change the process of education have aimed at improving its effectiveness. Therefore, stakeholders in education are asking what the benchmarks in choosing the right school? This paper reflects on a number of characteristics of a good school which contributes, in the highest possible degree towards the realization of the aims of education and more so, to the preparation of the young people for the future. The paper contends that there are a variety of factors; The major ones being the stakeholders in education, choosing the right school, the teacher, the type of curriculum, discipline, learning/teaching facilities and support of parents and the community, among others. Education, and by extension the school, is a dynamic process. It is usually influenced by changes in the society, which tend to create new demands on it. This paper sets out to discuss the benchmarks in choosing the right school and the way forward for schools in this millennium in Kenya.

Introduction
Experts in sociology of education, and many other interested people, view the school as a social organization, a pertinent source of sociological issues, particularly in view of the fact the school has been given the sole task of education or socializing children in order to make them responsible members of the society. Therefore a good school is one which contributes, in the highest possible degree, towards the realization of the aims of education and more so, to the preparation of the young people for the future

A Good Teacher
A good school must have men and women of superior personality, and adequate professional education, who see education as a means for promoting man's welfare, and who are enthusiastically devoted to the work of teaching. Teachers must have genuine concern for the welfare of learners and respect for their developing personalities, kindness and real interest. This

therefore means an endeavor to study their needs and constant efforts to find the best way, be interesting, resourceful and well informed.

The behaviour of the teachers, both in and out of the school is under constant and evaluative observation by the learners and by Parents. Therefore, the teacher's standard of ethical and social conduct must be beyond reproach. The primary role of the teacher is to create a conducive atmosphere for learning, be a good manager and a good role model to the students.

The Head Teacher

The headteaher is the leader in a school. He/she is the pivot around which many aspects of the school revolve. He/she is a person incharge of every detail in the running of school; be it academic or administrative. It is important that the headteacher is a leader, a thinker and decision make. The criteria underlying the appointment of such a person should be thought out in great detail, giving due attention to the needs of the institution. The headteacher should be a team leader, innovator, manager, role model and have foresight for the success of the school.

The Type of Curriculum the School Follows

Whatever the school wishes to accomplish is witnessed in the type of curriculum this school follows. There are many definitions of curriculum but the educational theorists, as people concerned with the problem of education define it as all the experiences of the learner that are under the control of the school. In other words, a curriculum is an instrument by which the schools seek to translate the society's hopes for education into concrete reality.

Teachers should see to it that children get the basic learning necessary for obtaining the physical necessities of life that they learn to work when they work and to plan they play, and gain the deep satisfaction that comes from learning to do different tasks well.

Effective Teaching Methods

How can learners be helped to learn? What method is best to this purpose? What is it that must be accomplished? It must therefore be noted that the method to be used should be that one which will help learners become creative, which will encourage them to develop attitudes of good will habits of moral conduct and skills in democratic procedures. Indeed for accomplishing results, education is quite as dependent upon methods used by teachers as upon a suitable curriculum.

High Standards of Discipline

A good school should effectively discipline its pupils. This of course depends upon the clear understanding of the moral discipline for the confusion of the meaning may produce poor results. Discipline for this case means the treatment suitable to the learner. When learners are interested and busy with learning then there is no difficulty with their conduct. In a nutshell the problem of discipline is solved by good teaching. Discipline produces conditions conducive to learning, production of self controlled young people, sensitive to the welfare of others as well as their own needs responsive to the call of duty.

If teachers can gain cooperation of learners and build a feeling of togetherness, then the problem of control will be less. An effective teacher like a sensible parent should give learners more freedom gradually as they show that they are capable of using that freedom wisely. Therefore teachers should help learners grow into self directing human beings and to see that conditions under which learning can go on prevail in the classroom.

Adequate Learning/Teaching Facilities

A good school should have adequate facilities. It helps both teachers and learners to effectively teach and effectively learn in convenient and comfortable surroundings. Beauty in classrooms helps to develop in the learners sensitiveness to beauty elsewhere. The school should be kept clean which of course means more than just sweeping the floors, cleaning floors, windows, doors, walls, ceiling, corners, cupboards, furniture and equipment like blackboard pictures and other teaching aids. The school should be kept clean inside and outside.

Support of Parents and Community that Serves the School

A school, just like other institutions, cannot operate at a high level of efficiency if it does not have good will and support of the parents and community it serves. A school must develop an understanding and appreciation of its programmes through interactions with parents and other members of the community. A school must maintain an effective programme of keeping the people informed of its needs, purpose and achievements and at the same time develop sensitivity to the needs and desires of the parents and the community at large.

Parents have a special concern for the school to which their children go and therefore the school must do what it can to satisfy them. The learning experiences at school must be satisfying, meaningful, relevant, interesting and pleasant for children and when this is done the man struggle for satisfactory parent-teacher relationship will be won and the way will open to effective team effort in the education of children.

Parents should have opportunities to talk to the headteachers individually as well as in a group. The headteacher in particular must always find time to talk to the parents about how a child can straighten out a difficulty concerning the performance or the progress or the future of a child who has been a source of worry to both the parents and the school. There must be a healthy communication between teachers and headteachers in particular and the community in general.

For the benefit of the whole development of the child it is important that the home where the child lives and the school which he/she attends do combine in unity.

Other Factors

Other factors considered are:
  ➢ The performance of the school in national examinations.
  ➢ Religious faith of the school.
  ➢ The distance and location of the school.
  ➢ The boarding facilities.

- ➢ Co-curricular activities.
- ➢ The track record of the school.
- ➢ The school administration and
- ➢ The sponsor

Conclusion

It is pointed out that in choosing the right school, the parents want the learners at the time of leaving the school to be equipped with a certain amount of knowledge that help them play their role in the world in general and in their communities in particular. Learners must adjust to the changing circumstances of life and think for themselves. The teacher is the most important resource in a school. It is important that a teacher knows the kind of school he/she is working in, its ethos, its specific aims and objectives. A school should be harmonious, secure and productive institution.

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