Fluorspar Primary ahead of the pack

Teaching at Kenya Fluorspar Primary School in Kerio Valley takes an approach that is believed to cultivate confidence in presentation and public speaking at an early age

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Tucked deep in the Kerio Valley in the far-flung and poorly developed Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya Fluorspar Primary School is the last place to expect to find pupils with highly developed skills in the use of rare hi-tech tools like the smart board.

But that's exactly what a visit to the institution on July 3 for the official opening of the school's library exposed.

"Here, the children have an opportunity to interact with computers at a very early age because of the facilities we have," Caroline Koskei, the school's head teacher, explained. "Besides the highly interactive smart boards that are available to classes Four through Eight, the library is also fitted with small notepad computers".

Lessons at Kenya Fluorspar Primary School are conducted in an interactive manner so as to give every pupil an opportunity to play "teacher" and guide the others through a lesson.

The approach, says Ms Koskei, makes learning an exciting exercise for the pupils. More importantly, it is believed to cultivate confidence in presentation and public speaking at an early age.

With human resource practitioners and hiring managers observing that many job seekers fail interviews because of poor presentation skills, there have been calls to introduce components of communication technology at early age in the Kenya's education system in order to groom young people early for future engagements in the corporate world.

"This generation is highly tech-savvy... but to make sure that their potential is fully tapped by the time they graduate to university, it's critical that the government introduces aspects of technology in public schools," agrees Moriasi Maranga, a lecturer at Daystar University in Nairobi.

By doing this, he says, the government will not be giving young people an opportunity to develop their communication skills, but will also be building information technology infrastructure across the country, which is a key component of Vision 2030.

Besides being an astute communicator and a confident public speaker, 13 year-old Kevin Kimutai says that his grades and interests in science lessons have been greatly improved since the smart boards were introduced in the school last year.

"I usually look forward to going to school everyday because learning through the highly interactive smart boards is very exciting," the class seven pupil says.

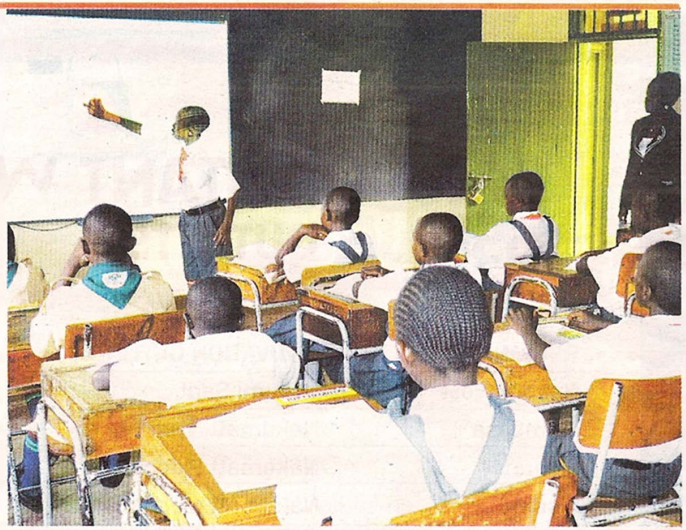
"For instance, you can arrange the entire reproductive system, or answer grammar questions and the machine will tell you whether you are wrong or right."

Kimutai's story is echoed by most of his colleagues, which Maranga says is the evidence that technology should be embraced as a medium of instruction in all levels of learning.

Such a system, Mr Maranga adds, is the way to go since it not only enhances technological know-how among young learners, but also moulds them into competent individuals who will be able to face interview panels with confidence when their time comes.

"In Rwanda, the government has integrated information technology components from primary school level all the way to the university. I don't see the reason why it can not be done here in Kenya," he notes.

But technology comes at a cost. A smart board complete with all its accessories costs about Sh400,000. To put one in every class in a standard public primary school in Kenya with three streams per class would cost about Sh9.6 million. Besides this would be the cost of installing relevant programmes and maintenance.



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Pupil Kevin Kimutai of Kenya Fluorspar Primary School uses a smartboard. The board, can for instance, correct students when they make mistakes.