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Uganda: Gayaza High's Sekyewa Demystified Mathematics

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BY PASCAL KWESIGA, 21 APRIL 2012

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OPINION

In my high school, I did not like mathematics. However, I think if I hadn been taught by Edward Sekyewa of Gayaza High School, I would have enjoyed the subject.

The 34-year-old teacher is the students' favourite because he has demystified the perception many had before joining Uganda's oldest girls school that mathematics is a difficult subject.

Although some students do not like studying mathematics in the afternoon and prefer learning the subject in the morning, students at Gayaza High School were interestingly enjoying the subject on a Friday afternoon. And Sekyewa was handling one of the abstract topics in mathematics, that is indices.

Simplifying mathematics

With each student holding a piece of manila paper, you would be forgiven to think that students were getting ready for a fine art test. On the contrary, Sekyewa had prepared the papers for each student to explain indices.

Holding a similar piece of paper, he folded the paper about three times with the students folding their respective papers along with him. Sekyewa was using the practical experiment to simplify indices whose principal is that any number power zero equals one.

The students were using papers as a base and they arrived at different numbers (powers) each time the paper was folded.

When they folded the papers once, two folds were seen on their papers upon opening them, which explains that two power one equals to two.

And when it was folded twice and unfolded immediately, the students saw four folds on their pieces of paper, which confirmed that two power two equals four.

And when the same papers were folded three times, they produced eight folds meaning that two power three equals eight. Indices may be confused with multiplication, but the two are completely different.

At the end of the lesson, the students had understood the essence of indices and ably carried out further practical experiments on their own.

The ease with which the students understand the subject and his practical illustrations, explains why Sekyewa is usually referred as Moving backhouse, the author of a mathematics text book Advanced Pure Maths I and II.

The students say they call Sekyewa Moving Back House is because he can ably revise with them most of the numbers in the textbook without consulting it.

He, however, explains that he now uses Introducing Pure Maths, another textbook by Robert Smedley and fears that students might soon begin calling him Robert Smedley.

Damalie Tendo, an S.4 candidate, says Sekyewa's practical illustrations are humorous and make the subject interesting. "He is very practical and he teaches more than what is expected in the syllabus," Tendo said.

Another S.4 candidate, Solome Byeganje, says Sekyewa has motivated them to love mathematics by telling them continuously that it is not a difficult subject as long

as one is interested in learning it.

"Like you have seen him using the paper to teach indices, he tries to be practical, while handling each topic and any practical experiment we do helps us understand those mathematical concepts that we thought were too difficult," she said.

Early beginnings

Born in June 15, 1977 to Henry Ssemujju and Jane Nabyonga in Buloba, Wakiso district, Sekyewa went to Rubaga Boys Primary School in 1983 where he completed P.7 in 1989. He joined Makerere College School in 1990 and he completed his A levels in 1997.

In 1998, he went to Makerere University for a bachelor of science and graduated with a second class upper degree in 2000. He explains that by then, a bachelor of science was an open course and graduates could be employed in other jobs.

Fresh from the university, Sekyewa was given a job to teach mathematics at Uganda Martyrs SS in Rubaga.

He did not give up on studies at this point. Sekyewa went back to Makerere University for a postgraduate diploma in education in 2003, majoring in mathematics and physics.

While at university, he abandoned his job at Uganda Martyrs and joined Ndejje SS in Luwero where he taught for a few years before he was approached by Gayaza High School deputy head mistress and offered a teaching job at one of the best performing schools.

Mentoring students

To ensure that students keep practising the subject even when they are not at school, Sekyewa has assisted them to open up email accounts that he uses to send them assignments during holidays. He adds that the students send him answers and queries through his email that he answers instantly.

Sekyewa encourages group work, discussions and lets the students take on the teaching role in class under his watch to assess their understanding of particular concepts in the subject.

Challenges

Sekyewa, who teaches mathematics and physics in O and A Level, says the Government policy of encouraging students to focus on science course has increased the number of students doing sciences resulting into a heavy workload for teachers.

However, he says the increased number of students doing science courses is a step in the right direction, adding that the numbers will even surge further with the current government policy to make submathematics and computer studies compulsory for A level students.

He says despite being a low paying job that ironically requires hard work and keen attention, the better performance of his students is the reason why he will remain stuck on this sort of employment for many years to come

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