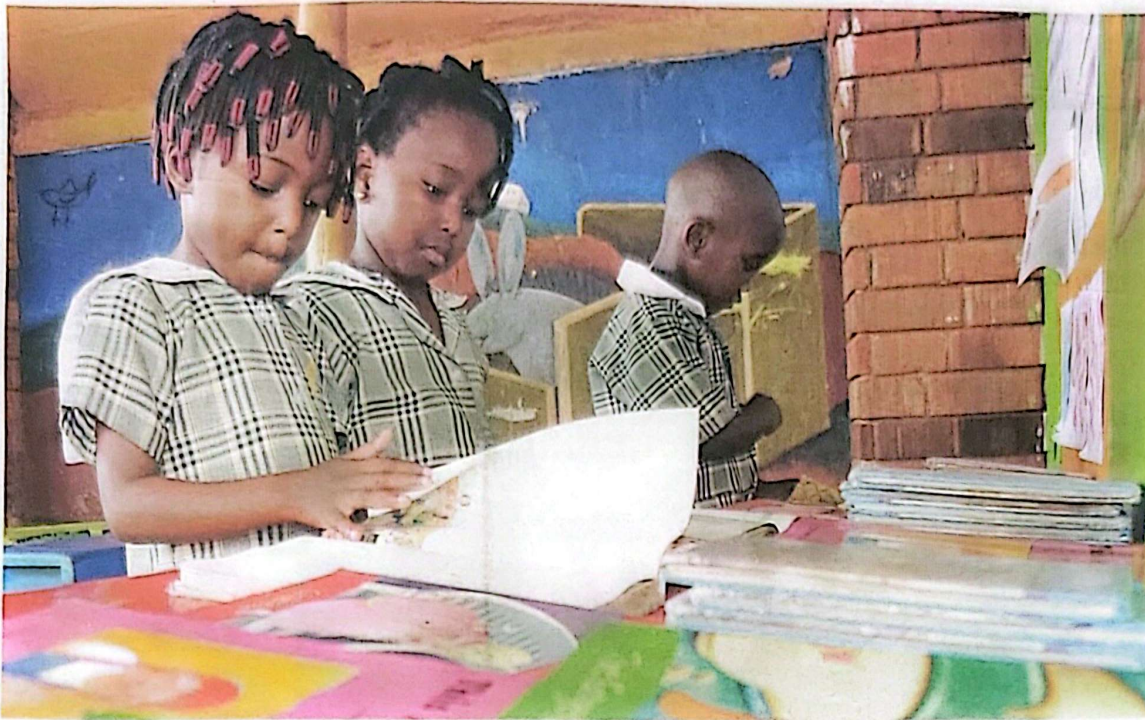




Children of different ages have different concentration levels. It is important that this is put into consideration when allocating time spent at school. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

In order to avoid an all work and no play situation, the time pupils spend in school should be regulated.

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Long class hours kill concentration

Early this year, the Education minister Janet Museveni raised concern about pupils spending longer hours in school saying no school should close as late as 8pm.

Agnes Ssembatya, a director of studies at Seeta Junior School Mbalala-Mukono, says classes start at 8am for lower primary of Primary One to Three. Primary Four to Primary Seven start classes at 7.50am and end at 4pm.

"However, slow learners are given a 30-minute allowance (remedial lessons) where they are given extra help. According to Ssembatya, such children are given time to help them grasp whatever they could have missed during lesson time," she says.

"Nursery to Primary Three, start classes at 8am and break off at 1pm, though a few return to school for afternoon sessions. The infants are picked up later or left to sleep or play until their parents come for them in the evening. However, they are not given core classes after 1pm," Ssembatya adds.

A chance to play

"As day scholars break off for home, they are sent off with homework but also get time to relax as well as get the informal education and life skills which boarding children may not get," says the teacher.

She mentions giving children interesting activities prior to the lessons which helps them connect to the new lesson. It also helps them to

Namirembe Parents School, as other grown-ups rush to class for revision, between 6.30am to 7.30am, nursery and lower primary classes of Primary One to Primary Two are assembled in a waiting room (s) where they watch television as well as recite words that are played on the screen until 7.50am when they are prepared for lessons.

These run for 30 minutes for the infants and 40 minutes per session for the grown-ups.

"Unlike the infants who rest after classes, older children are given at least five minutes to relax before commencing with another subject," she says, adding, "before the infants are sent off at 3pm, they freshen up and are given fruits and juice, 30 minutes before they are dropped home."

Take note of age

David Kavuma, a psychologist working with MildMay Uganda, explains that because infants have a short concentration span, they get bored and lose interest, hence losing interest in school and so their hours in school should be minimised.

"Class work for infants should always be minimal but incorpo-



Despite spending some hours playing at school, children need to interact with people outside school to acquire social and life skills. PHOTO BY GODFREY LUGAJU

rated with organised and practical play which mostly impact on the class work," he says. "Singing is not enough," he notes adding; "The little children's play involves touching and feeling because they all have different interests. Children of Primary One to Primary Three have a slightly

higher attention span as compared to infants and because of this, they have motivation and interesting lessons and should not be subjected to night lessons though they also need learning oriented activities."

Although the upper primary children have an averagely developed

THE CONCERN

For far too long, children even as young as four to five years have suffered sleep deprivation. Parents have to yank children out of bed as early as 5am and force them out of the house and get them onto the road to school by 6am. These youngsters are

Both parents and the school authorities seem to have connived to deny children their rights to be young, relax, play and enjoy a free and homely environment outside schools' restrictive walls.

This gruelling school regime means our children are left with almost no time

Besides, the care and role of bringing up children has largely been surrendered to schools. This is nearly a deliberate separation of children from families and hijacking the right and duty for parents to care for and bring up their children.

Allocation of time

Agnes Ssembatya, a director of studies at Seeta Junior School Mbalala-Mukono, says infants have their first break at 10.15am then resume class from 11am to 12pm, when they break off for lunch.

Primary Four to Primary Seven get a 30-minute break at 10.30am during which they have breakfast and relax before going back to class for lessons from 11am to 1pm. After this they go for a one-hour lunch break up to 2pm.

4pm

THE TIME CLASSES FOR UPPER PRIMARY CLASSES END.

"Primary One to Primary Three normally have relaxed afternoon sessions from 2pm to 4pm, however, this is different for those in Primary Four to Primary Seven who study until 5pm," she reveals. However, these also get time to play and relax before prep time at 7pm. Unlike day scholars who have a chance to change environment, those in boarding school have to return to class for teacher-pupil revision from 7pm to 8pm. The same happens in the morning before normal lessons commence at 7.50am, according to Ssembatya.

attention span, Kavuma discourages teachers from keeping them too long as this may lead to loss of interest and interaction with the teachers thus registering poor performance.

Concentration span

Similarly, Stephen Langa, a counselling psychologist at Family Life Network, discourages keeping little children in class for long, saying they have a low concentration span.

"Young children are better off taken home in a safer environment where they can learn at their pace and should not be overloaded with class material. This permits them a chance to learn other important life and social skills that play a great role in their development," he says.

Quoting Harvard University research which showed that academic qualifications contribute 15 per cent to one's life and the 85 per cent is contributed by informal education, he says some former academic dwarfs are billionaires.

Equally so, Ssembatya, discourages giving children too much work saying, it affects them in the process.

She explains that lack of time to relax may make a child an