

School visitation days: When good intentions need better planning

Across Uganda, school visitation days (VDs) are an important part of the school calendar. Parents travel to schools to see their children, interact with teachers, and assess academic progress. For many learners, visitation day is a moment of excitement and reassurance. Seeing a parent walk through the school gate reminds a child that someone cares deeply about their educational journey.

At their best, visitation days strengthen the relationship between parents, children and schools. They create an opportunity for parents to review report cards, discuss academic progress with children and teachers, and understand the social and emotional wellbeing of their children. They also motivate learners who feel encouraged when their parents show interest in their school life. In this way, visitation days serve as an important bridge between the home and the school.

They are one of the few moments in the school calendar when parents step into their children's academic world and interface with teachers. This also helps the parents who children have challenges with performance or behaviours make follow-ups and keep in touch with school.

Despite these benefits, an emerging challenge has become increasingly noticeable in recent years. In many cases, schools schedule visitation days on the same date, often across different regions of the country. For parents with children studying in multiple schools, this can create significant logistical difficulties.

Instead of spending meaningful time with each child, the day becomes a hurried journey across long distances.

In major urban centres, this pattern many VDs one day also contributes to heavy traffic jam as thousands of parents travel simultaneously to schools. The result is that the very purpose of visitation building connection and engagement with children may be undermined by the pressures of the day. Another challenge is that some schools understandably try to maximize the presence of parents by placing many activities on the same visitation day. Class meetings, discussions about discipline, academic performance reviews, and general parent meetings are often scheduled within the same limited time frame.

While these activities are important, concentrating them all on one day can leave parents feeling overwhelmed and rushed. Instead of having quality interaction with their children, parents may find themselves moving quickly from one meeting to another.

It is also important to acknowledge that not all parents view the situation negatively. Some actually prefer visitation days happening on the same day across schools because it allows them to complete all visits at once. For busy parents juggling work responsibilities, making one trip instead of several may appear more practical and affordable. This diversity of experiences suggests that the challenge is not visitation days themselves, but rather how they are planned and coordinated. There may be room for a more harmonized approach that considers the needs of families whose children attend different schools. One possible solution is for schools to share their visitation schedules with district education offices, church education secretariats, or school associations so that calendars can be coordinated within districts or regions and made aware to parents in advance. The concerned schools could also consider scheduling visitation days within a broader visitation window during the term rather than fixing them all on the same weekend.

In addition, schools might explore spreading some parent-related meetings across different occasions instead of concentrating everything on visitation day. Discussions on discipline, academic performance, and class matters could sometimes be scheduled separately or conducted through other communication channels.

Another related issue worth reflecting on is the consistent implementation of education policies. Recently, the Ministry of Education and Sports issued directives restricting the bringing of cooked or fast foods into schools. Many schools initially attempted to implement the directive, although reports suggest that in some cases practices have gradually returned to previous patterns. For education policies to achieve their intended goals, there must be consistent follow-up, communication, and cooperation between schools and education authorities.

Good intentions have always guided the idea of visitation days. With better coordination, thoughtful planning, and stronger collaboration between schools and education authorities, these important moments can become even more meaningful.

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