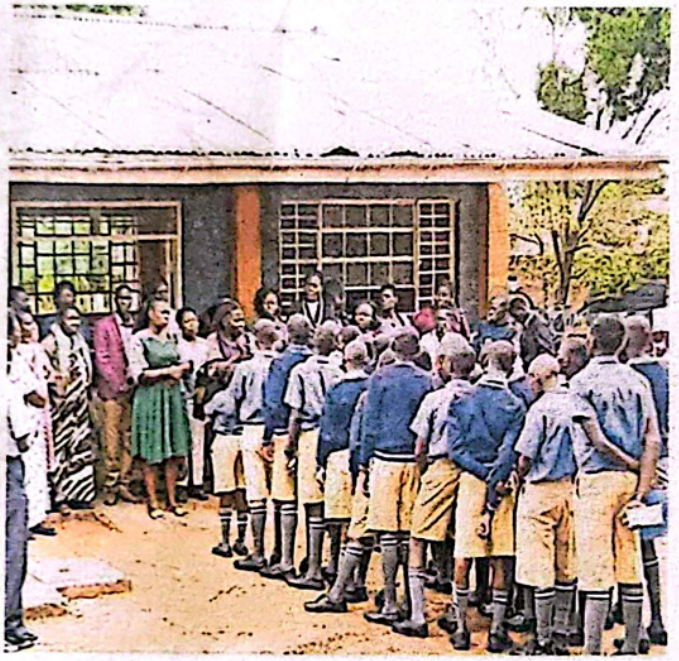
LETTER OF THE DAY

Rethinking how schools should prepare learners for exams



The release of the national examinations results is always a defining national moment. Celebration, disappointment as relief and quiet heartbreak sit side by side in homes and schools across the country. Yet beyond individual scores lies a deeper, more uncomfortable question that we must ask honestly as schools, educators, parents, and policymakers: Is the pressure we place on children to read and excel proportionate to the outcomes we are seeing?

One of the most painful realities for parents today is the financial cost attached to hope. Many private primary schools charge fees that are higher than those paid in universities and other tertiary institutions. On top of fees, parents are required to meet endless demands—mock exams, remedial classes, holiday packages, special uniforms, meals, transport, and examination-related charges.

Parents invest heavily, believing that higher fees guarantee better teaching, closer supervision, and superior outcomes. Their children can go to or remain in better top schools at O-level or A-level, or to university on government scholarships. Yet when results are released, the performance does not always match the financial sacrifice. For many families, this becomes not just an academic disappointment but an economic loss.

This disconnect should force schools to reflect honestly. If the pressure, time, and money invested are not yielding proportionate results, then something fundamental in the teaching and learning approach needs to change. Education should not become a high-risk financial gamble for families. Privatisation in schools seems to be causing financial loss to some parents.

There is a fine line between discipline and distress. In many schools, especially during P.6-P.7, S.3-S.4, and S.6, learning becomes a marathon of early mornings, late nights, endless tests, holiday "boot camps," and constant reminders that failure is not an option. Children are taught to fear exams rather than understand them. There is no more time for co-curricular activities for candidate classes.

Such environments often suffocate the very capacities children need to perform well: confidence, creativity, focus, and emotional stability. A fearful child may memorise content temporarily but struggle to retrieve it under tension and examination conditions.

Teachers must recognise the power of words. Encouragement builds effort; humiliation kills it. Every learner deserves to be taught with dignity. Differentiated instruction allows teachers to support struggling learners without shaming them. No child should carry the burden of a teacher's frustration or impatience.

Schools must begin by redefining what effective preparation looks like. Quality learning is not measured by the number of hours a child sits in class or the volume of tests administered, but by how well a learner understands concepts and applies them independently.

Children also need balance. Play, rest, music, sports, and peer interaction are not distractions from learning; they are essential components of healthy cognitive development.

Schools need to integrate psychosocial support into their academic programmes. Guidance and counselling should not be cosmetic departments activated only during crises. Teachers must be trained to recognise signs of stress, burnout, fatigue, and anxiety, and to respond with empathy and support. Teaching basic coping skills—time management, relaxation techniques, and positive self-talk can significantly improve performance without increasing academic pressure.

One of the tragic consequences of excessive pressure in schools is the rise in examination malpractice..Reducing pressure is therefore not only a child welfare issue but a moral one. When learners are taught in balanced, ethical environments that value effort and honesty, rest and self-reflection, passing on merit becomes achievable and sustainable.

Parents must resist the temptation to compare schools, grades, and children. PLE, UCE, or UACE is a milestone, not a final judgment. Encouragement, emotional safety, adequate rest, and realistic expectations often contribute more to success than pressure ever will. Parents should also ask schools hard but respectful questions: How do you support learner wellbeing? How do you handle struggling children? How do you prepare without inducing stress and fear? How do you promote rest/relaxation of your students or co-curricular activities?

The Ministry of Education and Sports must take leadership in resetting the culture around examinations. National messaging should affirm that learning is a process and that success has multiple pathways beyond one examination.

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