

Is the postponed reopening of schools for term one justified?

Uganda, every five years revisits, the arena from where her citizens get to select the voices to represent them on the floor of Parliament and other dimensions of governance at both central and local government levels. This season comes with a combination of excitement and agitation that the political atmosphere is tense. This time, elections for Presidential Candidates and MPs took place on January 15, 2026 allowing citizens to exercise their civic rights in accordance with Article 38 of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda. However, the election process is still on until early February when other organs will also be represented and this has pushed the Ministry of Education and Sports to postpone the opening dates for all institutions of Learning to February 10, 2026.

The decision to postpone the reopening of schools to facilitate participation in the election process has both positive and negative impacts.

On a positive note, it puts the safety of students at the centre of policy and governance bearing in mind the uncertainties that come with election period in Uganda. This is a period when the streets become a patrolling site for men in uniform which creates unnecessary fear among citizens. Uganda, ranked among the most youthful countries, means that majority of its citizens who are involved in the election process are school going. This means that participants would have to balance their civic rights by voting vis- à-vis their right to education as enshrined under Article 30 of the Grand norm.

The ministry is of the view that citizens should be allowed to operate under clear circumstances without proceeding with uncertainties about the safety of students given that anything abrupt can happen, especially in hotspots and also considering that some schools serve as polling stations.

This, to me, is the rationale behind the directive from the ministry but the key question that remains to be answered is whether it is the best alternative in this contemporary setting.

In the 20th century, this would have served as a well calculated move given that education in those times required physical interaction between teachers and students. In 2026, with the incorporation of digital means in our day-to-day lives, the initial closure and subsequent postponement of schools in this period was not the best directive the ministry should have given.

Africa has for years been on the other side of the digital divide in almost every aspect of life — housing, education and finance, etc. However, with many Internet service providers and smart phones around, e-learning has been embraced by many institutions.

Even the Electoral Commission embraced technology with the introduction of biometric devices in the voting process, showing the significance of technology in simplifying activities.

But now, when it came to consideration of whether to have students continue with their education in this period, the ministry did not consider that some institutions have a blended learning system where students are able to study remotely and physically, depending on the circumstances.

The ministry has forgotten some of the mitigating measures it introduced when we were hit by the Covid-19 pandemic where lessons were conducted via radio and TV. The same ministry, after five years, has come up with the most analogue risk-mitigating measure that ultimately disrupts the progress and planning of the academic activities by schools and students.

The best alternative would be to advise institutions with capacity and equipment to enable e-learning to use that as an alternative to attending physical classes rather than bringing a halt to studies in fear of physical violence that might be inflicted on the students should they go to school.

To sum it up, technology is here to work for us and, therefore, we should always look out for the most feasible alternatives when faced with uncertainties rather than completely burying our heads in the sand. Learning does not have to be physical, it could be from your sitting room, bedroom or kitchen.

In future, when faced with similar challenges, evaluate and weigh in the alternatives such that we break free from analogue thinking and embrace the technology-driven solutions to our modern problems.

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