



FREE TO OUR READERS

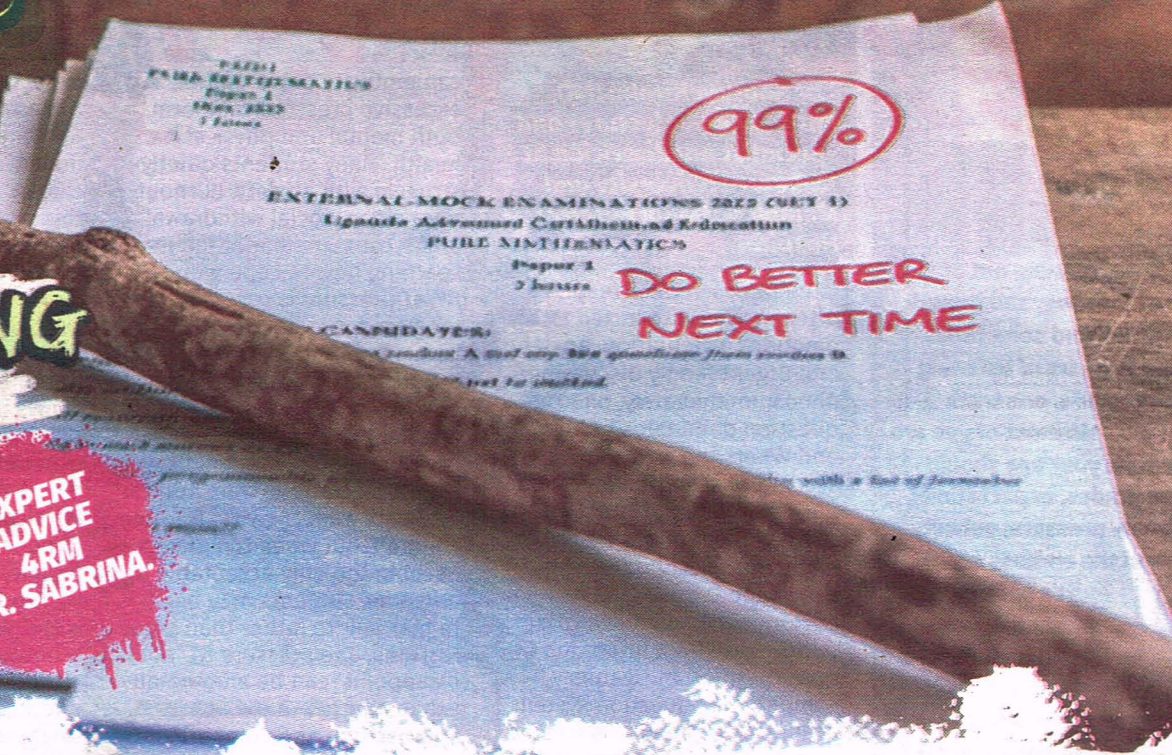
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2026

# TEEN VISION

## Bwat Tax

WHEN EXCELLING FEELS LIKE FAILING.

EXPERT ADVICE 4RM DR. SABRINA.



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BY BRENDA BALUKA

You've heard it whispered in corridors, shouted in dorms, and typed aggressively into class WhatsApp groups right after results are pinned. It's never followed by silence, only awe, envy, and a little

fear. A *bwat* is not just clever. A *bwat* is weaponised intelligence. The kind that makes teachers smile before you even raise your hand. The kind that turns 99% into a casual personality trait.

But is being a *bwat* a superpower, or just another label carrying invisible weight?

WHO EXACTLY IS A BWAT?

In Western schools, they call them academic weapons. Here? We keep it shorter.

Sharper. More efficient. *Bwat*. A *bwat* is that student who finishes the paper, rereads it, and still has time to borrow a pen and help someone spell photosynthesis. They answer questions like they've already seen

tomorrow's exam marking guide. They're not always loud. Sometimes they're quiet. Observing. Calculating. Sometimes they're annoying. Sometimes they're your friend, until results day. And just like global pop

culture has Rory Gilmore and Hermione Granger, Uganda has its own versions: the Head Prefect with straight A's, the girl who balances debate club, Interact, and still tops her stream, or the boy who reads ahead "for fun" (yes, we're judging him softly).

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What's **KAWA** NOT KAWA

LENINI KIYEMBA, 17, KISORO.



**KAWA?**  
...when we have camping programmes after school with other students.

**NOT KAWA?**  
...when friends call you for hang out, only to find out that they are drinking alcohol.

SEND US UR DOPE PHOTO AND TEXT US WHAT'S KAWA—WHAT'S NOT VIA OUR WHATSAPP: +256 783 002 805.

**EDITOR'S WAGWEZ!**

Hey Squadrino! Jump in!  
Breathe. You're not running out of time. You're just growing, and growth is messy, confusing, and sometimes loud. After over 10 years of listening to teens across Uganda, one truth keeps repeating itself: most of you are carrying more than your age should allow. Between grades, expectations, heartbreak, family pressure, puberty and the endless scroll, it's easy to feel like you're falling behind in a race no one fully explained. You're not weak for feeling overwhelmed; you're human. And you don't have to carry it all alone. Seek help.

HUMPHREY WAMPULA  
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**THE PART NOBODY APPLAUDS**

From the outside, being a *bwat* looks glamorous. Teachers trust you. Parents brag about you. Relatives mention you at funerals for no reason.

But behind the neat handwriting and glowing report cards is pressure that clings like chalk dust.

Once you become the *bwat*, you stop being allowed to be average, even for a day.

Score 99%? Expected. Score 85%? "What happened?" Get tired? "But you're smart."

Suddenly, intelligence is no longer something you have, it's something you must perform.

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE BWAT**

**OLYMPICS.**

Enter social media, the official sponsor of

unnecessary comparison. Timetables that look like military operations. Teenagers waking up at 4:30 AM to "grind" preps like sleep is a crime.

You rest for one afternoon and your brain reminds you: *Someone is revising.*

*Someone got a scholarship.*

*Someone just posted "Hard work pays".*

Even if you're doing well, really well, it still feels like you're behind.

That's when being a *bwat* stops feeling like excellence and starts feeling like a trap.

**HERE'S THE PLOT TWIST.**

Most *bwats* didn't wake up magically smart. They worked. They struggled. They failed quietly. They cried over marks nobody else saw.

Being a *bwat* is not effortless, it's built through

repetition, discipline, and sometimes unhealthy self-pressure. That's why the label feels real. Not because it's shiny, but because it costs something.

And here's the uncomfortable truth:

Not everyone is meant to be that *bwat*, and that's okay.

**SO... DO YOU NEED TO BE A BWAT TO WIN AT LIFE?**

Short answer? No.

Long answer? Still no, but with context.

You don't need to top every class to succeed.

You don't need perfect grades to be intelligent.

You don't need a label to validate your effort.

Some people grow loudly. Others grow quietly.

Some shine early. Others bloom later, after school has stopped ranking them like exam scripts.

**FINAL BELL**

Being a *bwat* is not about looking productive or collecting praise. It's about learning without losing yourself in the process.

And if you're not a *bwat*? You're not behind.

You're just running your own race, at your own pace, without an audience shouting "expected performance".

Success doesn't wear one uniform. Brilliance doesn't always come top of the class. Sometimes, it just survives school with its sanity intact.

**? SOME STUDENTS TIE THEIR ENTIRE IDENTITY TO GRADES. WHAT HAPPENS PSYCHOLOGICALLY WHEN A TEEN FAILS OR SCORES LOWER THAN EXPECTED AFTER BEING KNOWN AS "THE SMART ONE"?**

Dr Sabrina Kitaka (MD, PhD). A senior lecturer and specialist paediatrician at Makerere University and Mulago National Referral Hospital.

The release of PLE results often arrives with mixed emotions, celebration, anxiety, and urgent family discussions. Almost immediately, one question dominates homes and WhatsApp groups: *Which secondary school will my child join?*

This choice carries weight. A student's secondary school can shape O-Level and A-Level performance, influence career paths, and affect future job opportunities. In Uganda's competitive education system, academic excellence is treated as a gateway to success. But where excellence is highly valued, pressure often follows closely.

That pressure, commonly called *BWAT* pressure or academic pressure, is the stress caused by high expectations from parents, teachers, schools, and students themselves. While a manageable level of pressure

can motivate performance, excessive pressure can harm both mental and physical health. Many students quietly struggle with anxiety, burnout, poor sleep, social withdrawal, and a constant fear of failure. Learning how to cope with *BWAT* pressure is essential for long-term success and well-being.

**What Causes BWAT Pressure?**

Several factors fuel academic pressure among students.

**High Expectations from Adults:**

Parents want the best for their children, but when top grades become the only acceptable outcome, students may begin to fear failure rather than enjoy learning. The pressure to "not disappoint" can be emotionally exhausting.

**Competition and Comparison:**

Limited spaces in top schools create a high-stakes environment. Constant comparison of grades and rankings can make students feel as though they are always falling behind, even when they are performing well.

**Self-Imposed Pressure and Heavy Workloads:**

Many students internalise

expectations and push themselves relentlessly. Combined with heavy homework loads, frequent exams, and packed schedules, this pressure can quickly become overwhelming.

**How Excessive Pressure Affects Students.**

When academic pressure becomes too intense, its impact shows up in many areas.

Mentally, students may experience anxiety, low mood, and loss of confidence.

Physically, stress often leads to poor sleep; headaches, fatigue, and reduced immunity.

Behaviorally, some students withdraw socially, avoid schoolwork, or lose motivation altogether.

Ironically, pressure meant to improve grades can reduce performance. High stress interferes with concentration, memory, and problem-solving, making learning harder rather than easier.

**Coping with BWAT Pressure.**

**Adopt a Growth Mindset:**

Mistakes are not proof of failure; they are part of learning. Focus on progress

rather than perfection. Compete with your past self instead of constantly comparing yourself to others.

**Set Realistic Goals:**

Big dreams are important, but improvement should be gradual. Small, achievable goals, such as steady grade improvement. Build confidence and reduce frustration.

**Prioritise Self-Care and Seek Support:**

Adequate sleep, exercise, and regular meals are essential for academic success.

Simple stress-management practices like deep breathing or journaling can help. Most importantly, talk to teachers, parents, or counselors when pressure feels overwhelming. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Being a *BWAT* is an achievement, but it should never cost you your health. Success is a journey, not a constant performance. With balance, support, and realistic expectations, academic pressure can become motivation rather than a burden.



# EXTRA TIME EXTRA PRESSURE

When extra school days test discipline, focus, and academic survival.

BY GRACE KENNETH TENDO

School has been extended. Not postponed. Not cancelled. Extended.

That strange academic purgatory where time stretches like chewing gum under a desk, and every day feels like a recycled Monday. Bells still ring, teachers still glare, but motivation starts packing its bags quietly. It's the season where discipline loosens its tie and focus begins to blink

suspiciously.

For teenagers, school extension is not just a calendar issue, it's a mental test. One minute you're promising yourself to revise, the next minute you're staring at the wall, wondering how you ended up here again.

So let's ask the question sitting heavily on every student's chest: **Now that school is extended, can teenagers save their grades from falling?**

## The Redemption Arc Nobody Wants to Start.

But here's the twist nobody likes to hear: This extension could be your academic redemption arc.

If your report card has been looking like a crime scene, this is your clean-up season. An **F** does not have

to be a life sentence. With discipline, consistency, and a little academic suffering, an **F** can crawl into **C** territory. A **C** can stretch into a **B**. It won't be glamorous, but neither is repeating a class while your friends move on.

This is not about being brilliant. It's about being stubborn.

## The Only Plot Worth Following.

Right now, focus is currency. This is the season to mute the noise, lower the drama, and reduce life to basics. The only plot that matters is the one that starts at Point A, bends through confusion, and lands, finally, at Point C in your Mathematics revision book.

Instead of studying who partied where, study biological processes. Instead of revising gossip, revise how diseases spread and why the tsetse fly has ruined entire ecosystems. One gives you stories for lunch break. The other gives you options after school.

## When Grades Don't Fall, They Slide.

Grades rarely collapse with drama. They don't scream. They slip. Slowly. Like a book sliding off a desk during prep, by the time it hits the floor, the damage is already done.

This is the danger zone. Lessons feel optional. Revision becomes "tomorrow." Homework starts collecting dust like unused lockers. And suddenly, that comfortable **C** is flirting with a **D**, while the **D** is staring down an **F** with unsettling confidence.

## UNEB Is Emotionally Unavailable.

Here's the cold truth they won't soften during assembly: School extension does not pause reality.

UNEB is not your auntie. It will not understand your struggle. Final exams will arrive exactly when planned... sharp, punctual, and unforgiving. And that Mathematics teacher who sets questions like riddles from the Old Testament? He will not say, "Given the circumstances..." on UNEB day. The syllabus is still intact. The pressure is still real. And the marking scheme is not in a forgiving mood.

## Discipline Is Not Pretty, But It Works.

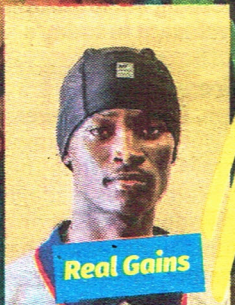
Let's be honest. Revision during school extension is not aesthetic.

There are no cinematic Insta reels. No applause. Just silent effort, scratched-out answers, and the slow grind of understanding something that once felt impossible.

But this is how grades are saved. Not through miracles, but through uncomfortable consistency.

## TEENS REACT

Benson, 18, Seroma Christian High School.



Real Gains

"This time is enough for teenagers to shift their focus to real gains. Education is a precious gift. Many teenagers can't even afford to be in school. We should use this period to save our grades and, hopefully, make our parents proud."

Collin Junior.



Books & Boots

"During the extended holidays, I play football and study at the same time. I believe teenagers can save their grades while still enjoying their hobbies. Balancing both helps reduce stress—and keeps your mind and body in the game."

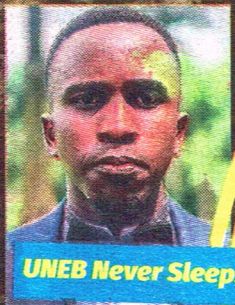
Joanita Tracy, 18, Nabisunsa Girls' School.



Books Before Breaks

"Yes, teenagers can still save their grades during this period. What may look like free time to catch up with friends is actually a second chance to revise and recover. Education is the real key. You either open the door for yourself, or someone else will walk through theirs while you're still scrolling."

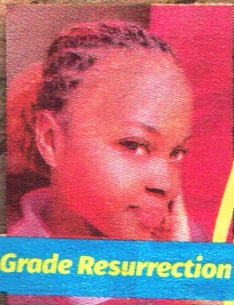
Ssekankya Ian, 19.



UNEB Never Sleeps

"A lot has been happening during these holidays. Every Ugandan teenager knows. But equations won't change, definitions won't soften, and exams will show zero sympathy. As we dance to Kapeke or Baraka, let's remember UNEB still exists. As we protect the gains, let's protect our grades too."

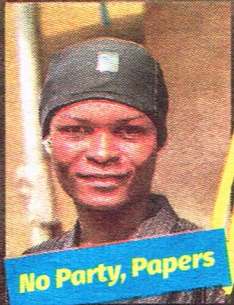
Nantume Pracidia, 18, Kyambogo College.



Grade Resurrection

"Yes, we can. Now that school is extended, we still have a chance to save our grades. Some results were so critical they qualified for a funeral. But with this grace period from the president, *jajja*, it's time to resurrect them. The ball is in our hands."

Kasozi Abubahr, 19.



No Party, Papers

"This is the season to finish assignments and holiday packages. It will spare you future 'inconveniences' with teachers (and yes, teenagers know the ones I mean). The only parties worth attending are in our rooms, with a chemistry book, sweating, memorising, and reciting word for word."

# PERSONALITY TEST

**INSTRUCTIONS:** To answer, circle the option that best identifies you.  
Flip paper upside-down to view results.

## Bwat Energy Challenge

### TEST

**When exam results are released, your first feeling is:**

- A. Relief that I met expectations.
- B. Anxiety about whether I disappointed anyone.
- C. Motivation to improve, regardless of position.
- D. Indifference. I know grades don't define me.

**Teachers often see you as:**

- A. Reliable and consistently excellent.
- B. Talented but under too much pressure.
- C. Capable but unpredictable.
- D. Quiet, thoughtful, and underestimated.

**When you score lower than usual, you think:**

- A. "I'll fix this next time."
- B. "Everyone will think I'm falling off."
- C. "This shows where I need to grow."
- D. "One paper doesn't change who I am."

**Your relationship with studying is best described as:**

- A. Structured and disciplined.
- B. Intense and exhausting.
- C. Flexible and interest-driven.
- D. Minimal but purposeful.

**On social media, productivity posts make you feel:**

- A. Inspired.
- B. Guilty.
- C. Selectively motivated.
- D. Unmoved.

**When people call you a bwat, you feel:**

- A. Proud.

**Results:**  
- The Self-Aware Protector (Mostly A's)  
- The Growing Decision-Maker (Mostly B's)  
- The Vulnerable Under Pressure (Mostly C's)  
- The Confused Explorer (Mostly D's)

- B. Trapped.
  - C. Unsure it fits.
  - D. Relieved they finally noticed.
- Your biggest fear in school is:**
- A. Falling behind.
  - B. Losing your "smart" reputation.
  - C. Not reaching your potential.
  - D. Being invisible.

## WORRR'D

**The High-Performance Bwat (Mostly A's)**

You thrive on structure, consistency, and discipline. Excellence is familiar territory for you.  
**Advice:** You are more than your performance. Rest is not laziness. Even machines need maintenance. Humans need it more.

**The Pressured Bwat (Mostly B's)**

You are capable and intelligent, but expectations weigh heavily on you. Your intelligence often feels like an obligation.  
**Advice:** Your worth does not drop when your grades do. Intelligence should serve you, not imprison you.

**The Growing Bwat (Mostly C's)**

You learn through exploration and reflection. You may not always top charts, but your growth is steady and real.  
**Advice:** Progress doesn't need applause to be valid. Trust your process, even when it looks different.

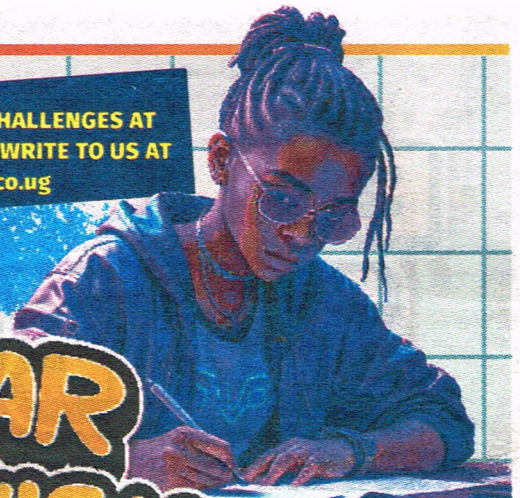
**The Quiet Genius (Mostly D's)**

You may not fit the typical "bwat" image, but your intelligence runs deep. You think independently and value balance.  
**Advice:** Being unseen doesn't mean being behind. Your timing is your power.

**GOT QUESTIONS? GOT CHALLENGES AT SCHOOL? IN YOUR LIFE? WRITE TO US AT [teenvision@newvision.co.ug](mailto:teenvision@newvision.co.ug)**



# DEAR TEEN VISION



**Brian, 17, St. Charles Lwanga SS, Kasese.** During holidays, some of my friends survive by "being close" to older people who help them with money. They say it's not really prostitution, just help. I haven't joined them, but sometimes hunger and school needs make me wonder if I'm being unrealistic. How do I survive without crossing lines I may regret?

**Advice:** Brian, when survival becomes desperate, values are tested quietly, not dramatically. Many risky paths begin not with desire, but with need. What makes these situations dangerous is not just disease, but the loss of control, when support comes with unspoken expectations. HIV often spreads where power is unequal and choices are limited. Protecting yourself means planning ahead, even imperfectly. Look for alternatives that preserve your dignity: temporary work, trusted relatives, school administrators, faith or community groups. Struggle with honesty is safer than comfort tied to silence. Hunger passes; consequences often do not.

**Hamza, 18, Arua Secondary School, Arua.** I run a small roadside business. Some girls joke that I should "appreciate" them since they bring customers. I laugh it off, but the pressure is there. I fear that business success may pull me into things I didn't plan for. How do I stay focused?

**Advice:** Hamza, temptation does not always come as force, it often comes disguised as humour and flattery. When money and attention increase, boundaries are tested. Staying focused means deciding in advance what kind of life you are building, not negotiating values in the moment. Busyness with purpose is protection. Keep your goals visible, your time structured, and your interactions respectful. Success should strengthen your discipline, not weaken it. What you build now should not cost you your peace or health later.

**Esther, 15, St. Monica Girls' School, Kisoro.** I don't cry or feel dramatic, but I wake up tired, lose interest easily, and feel like life is just repetition. People think depression means sadness, so I keep quiet. Am I just lazy?

**Advice:** Esther, depression does not always announce itself loudly. Sometimes it whispers through exhaustion, loss of interest, and emotional heaviness. This is not laziness, it is your mind asking for care and rest. Small steps matter: regular sleep, physical movement, balanced meals, and talking to someone you trust. Silence feeds isolation. Naming what you feel is not weakness; it is the first step toward healing.

**Joseph, 17, Kigezi High School, Kabale.** People say abstinence is unrealistic and that "smart teens" just manage risk. I believe in abstaining, but sometimes I feel foolish for holding on. Is discipline still relevant in today's world?

**Advice:** Joseph, discipline never goes out of date, it simply becomes rarer. While the world celebrates managing risk, wisdom focuses on avoiding unnecessary harm altogether. Abstinence is not ignorance; it is foresight. What feels "uncool" today often becomes respected tomorrow. Discipline builds clarity, confidence, and direction. You are not behind, you are ahead of consequences many will only understand later.

**Counselors answering your questions from Reach A Hand, Uganda.**



**JOASH SSEBUGULU JOAN ATUHAIRWE MUGASA SHAROT ABAHIRWA**