

# Uganda needs to rethink PLE teaching format



**EDUCATION**  
**PHILIP**  
**KATATUMBA**

In most Ugandan primary school classrooms, learning is dominated by four subjects: social studies, mathematics, science and English. These are the pillars upon which Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) rest. Parents, teachers, and learners all echo the same mantra: aggregate four. By Primary Six, most learners are aiming at this singular goal of passing PLE.

When play, music, art, storytelling, and imaginative exploration are pushed to the margins, children can become insecure, timid and afraid to make mistakes. They are “too shocked to move, too scared to speak”.

This is what is lost when the drive for measurable results eclipses the need to nurture creativity, curiosity and social growth.

The current PLE system inadvertently silences the voices and visions of young learners. It teaches

children to pass, but not to imagine or create; to comply, but not to question and to be serious, but never playful.

Research and lived experience agree — play is not a luxury, it is a necessity. It is how children develop emotional intelligence, resilience, empathy, and innovation. Artistic expression fosters self-worth, language development and collaboration. Yet in many schools, a child who dances freely or sketches thoughtfully may be seen as idle.

Play-based environments help children thrive across all domains, including academics. They allow multiple intelligences to flourish: spatial, musical, interpersonal, bodily-kinesthetic and more. For many children in rural areas or low-

income families, this may be their only chance to discover who they are, recognise their gifts, and nurture their talents.

Reimagining the curriculum does not mean discarding rigour. It means redefining excellence — not just by examination scores, but by how well our children engage the world with wonder, care and originality.

Historically, good performance in Primary Seven was seen as a gateway to good secondary school institutions that prized memorisation and obedience, hoping to shine in Senior Four and Senior Six.

But the syllabus has changed and the tide is turning. Today, schools increasingly value learners who are expressive, creative, confident in discussion, skillful in execution and

emotionally intelligent in navigating life's complexities.

So, parents should not just ask about academics. Ask more pertinent questions:

- How much playtime does my child get here?
- Where are the swings and climbing frames?
- Where is the art and music room?
- Are the J7s connecting through play, or buried in their books?
- Where are the signs that remind children of their rights?

The future we want requires learners who can think beyond the worksheet — who, given the right tools, can shape a better present and an even bright future.

**The writer is a parent**