

## Out To Lunch

# Uneb chair's exam grading argument needs immediate implementation

**Y**ou may probably know a parent or even a child who is stressed due to their performance in the national exams.

By the time of writing, the Uganda National Examination Board (Uneb) had already released the results of the Primary Leaving Examination and the Uganda Certificate of Examination.

Learners who think they should have performed better than their results are stressed. Parents and guardians are making endless calls to schools in search of admission letters. Headteachers of some of the prominent schools have taken to hiding due to pressure.

Prominent people are praying their friends don't call them asking for help to place their children.

And once a child is admitted, parents have a day or two to pay school fees in full lest the vacancy is given to another child on the waiting list. If you thought teachers have no power, this is the season of the year where they get to exercise it or simply hide and switch off their phones.

However, amidst the brouhaha that usually accompanies the release of the results of the national exams by Uneb and the hustling for schools by parents and guardians that follows, something the chair of the examination body said may have been missed by many.

Prof Celestino Obua argued that the current grading system needs to be changed to "avoid the magic of aggregate 4" when it comes to the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). He said that a child who gets aggregate 4, which is the highest, may in actual sense have only performed better by four marks than the one who got aggregate 8.

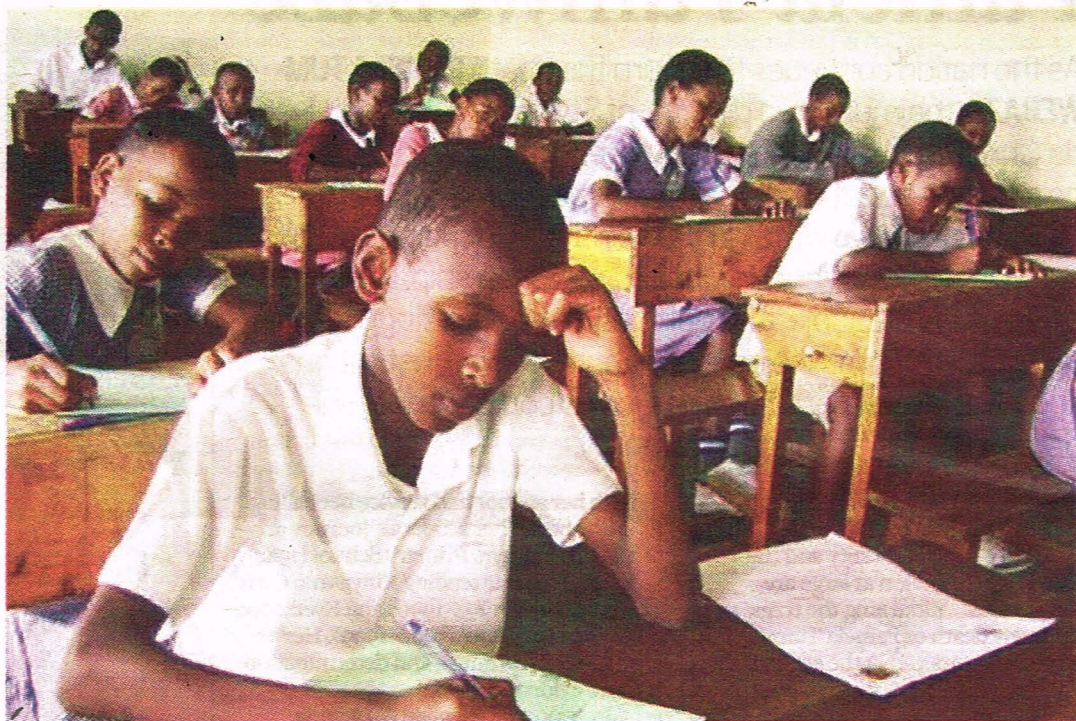
He gave an example where aggregate 4 may have been as a result of a child getting 80 marks out of 100 per a paper, which is a total of 320 marks out of 400 (four papers, each at a total of 100 marks).

The one who gets aggregate 8 may have got 79 marks in each of the paper, with a total of 316 marks out of 400.

But the one who has just 4 marks more is celebrated and the red carpet is rolled out. The parent or guardian doesn't have to call anyone to have the child admitted to their preferred schools.

Newspapers flash the learner on the front pages. The teacher may even win a trip to Europe. The parent of the learner celebrates and shares the news in each and every WhatsApp group.

The one who got aggregate 8 and missed the aggregate 4 grade by a mere 4 marks is left stressed and made to feel unworthy. Some of such children



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spend weeks crying.

They miss out on joining their preferred secondary schools (or even universities in cases of secondary schools) and sometimes their lives are ruined forever.

It takes a lot of time to regain confidence and push again. Some don't even recover at all.

It is under that background that Prof Obua argued the need to return to the actual marks grading system of the 1980s and abandon the current grading system of aggregates.

I have tried to search for information on why the 1980s grading system was abandoned but haven't found much. Blame the lack of internet at the time.

However, Prof Obua's argument needs to be supported.

Also, the grading system needs to change in case we are not ready for

change. To get aggregate 1 in a paper, a child almost needs to be 100% correct in all their answers. And it isn't just correct answers, actually, but also punctuations and the like. You miss a full stop; you miss a mark.

The marks are simply too high. What is wrong with a child getting 75% and that is considered aggregate 1 or A in case we don't want to change the system to the 1980s one Prof Obua talked about?

We should be more interested in learners' passing their exams than making them look like failures, because they scored a 75% out of 100. In real life, usually 75% is excellent work. Why can't that be the same in exams?

Since Uneb doesn't seem to have the power to change the grading system (otherwise its board chair wouldn't be complaining), the ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) should have a sit down with him, listen to his idea, do whatever they need to do, such as consultative meetings over coffee, and change the grading system. While at it, they should also think about the exams themselves.

Are national exams necessary since we are not at the same level of development? Why not regional ones?

Wouldn't a regional curriculum actually be better than a national one to cater for the interests of each region? Over to you ministry of Education.

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