

Why schools ignore govt rule, teach during holiday

Resting dilemma. Students say online learning is less demanding, but it still limits free time.

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A section of educators strongly opposes any form of structured holiday learning. Ms Robinah Kizito, the headteacher of Gayaza High School said his institution does not organise holiday coaching at all.

"For us, a holiday is a holiday. Students need to rest, spend time with family, and refresh their minds. That is part of education," she said.

Ms Kizito argued that continuous academic pressure can be counterproductive, saying, "If you keep learners in books all the time, they burn out. When the new term begins, they are already tired."

Parents weigh in

Parents remain split, with some supporting coaching for academic gain, while others worry about the cost and pressure.

Ms Jennifer Nayebara, a parent in Kampala, said physical coaching gives her confidence, that her child is learning and safe unlike being left at home laying idle.

"At least when they go to school, you know they are studying. At home, they can easily be distracted into sexual related activities by strangers and neighbors. An idle mind in this digital age can only cause problems yet they can do something to their academic revision," she said.

However, another parent, Mr Ibrahim Ssenkoole, admits the financial burden is significant.

"You pay extra for coaching, transport, and meals. It is not easy, but you fear your child being left behind. I am a single father who can't keep track of my daughter during the day, so I feel it is better to keep her at coaching sessions."

Students feel the strain

For learners, the experience varies depending on the approach adopted by their schools. Florence Nakanjako, a senior four student at Maya Secondary



A mother does homework with her daughter . PHOTO/FILE

school, says physical coaching leaves little room for rest.

"In my primary, we used to go for coaching, but it feels like the term has not ended. You wake up early, attend classes, and come back tired. There is no difference from a normal school," she said.

Nakanjako adds that while online learning is less demanding, it still limits free time.

"Currently, teachers provide revision assignments in our WhatsApp groups that will be handed in at the start of the second term, when you are still thinking about books. You don't fully relax."

Another student, Joel Kato, a senior in the sixth year, said holiday coaching often feels unavoidable.

"Even when it is said to be optional, you feel like you must attend because teachers will continue from there. If you miss, you struggle to catch up when

school reopens," he said.

Asked about this, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education and Sports, Dr Kedrace Turyagyenda stressed that holidays are important for a child's overall growth beyond academics, noting that continuous academic pressure without breaks can affect the quality of learning.

"Learning requires balance. There must be time for rest for proper understanding and development. When learners are overloaded, the outcome is not necessarily better performance. This time is to rest, be with their families, participate in religious and community activities, and develop life skills," she said.

She noted that holiday coaching was banned due to its consequences, prompting the need for tighter guidance.

"At the time, it was discouraged; we

had seen clear cases of abuse where some teachers would reserve difficult and important topics for holiday coaching. This meant that only learners who could pay were able to access that content, leaving out those from low-income families," she said.

Ms Turyagyenda added: "That is why we emphasise that holidays should not be turned into academics. When schools extend structured teaching into this period, it disrupts the school calendar and the broader learning system."

The Secretary General of the Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU), Filbert Baguma, said the growing trend of structured holiday coaching undermines the purpose of school breaks and risks harming learners.

"Timetables that extend into the holidays, with continuous lessons, deny learners the opportunity to rest. The assumption that pumping learners with endless content will automatically improve performance is misguided," he

said.

Mr Baguma noted that the problem is compounded by parental pressure, arguing that many families have shifted their responsibilities entirely to schools.

"Parents are also contributing to this. They have, in many cases, abandoned their role in shaping the child. Learners need time at home to develop personal discipline, values, and life skills," he said.

Mr Baguma further criticised weak enforcement of education policies.

"Enforcement has not been effective. Some government officials are involved in running private coaching arrangements in their garages and schools. It becomes difficult to enforce standards when there is conflict of interest between those preaching water but taking wine," he said.

He also highlighted the pressure teachers face, saying many are compelled to work during holidays against their will.

"For most teachers, this is not a choice. If a school director decides to conduct holiday coaching, you either comply or risk losing your job. Teachers are trying to survive and earn a living, so they are left with little option," he said.

Health experts also highlight that limited rest time for learners can pose a risk that might never be resolved, even in the future.

Ms Janet Kantalama, a psychologist at Safe Places Uganda, said excessive academic engagement during holidays can have both short- and long-term effects on learners' mental and emotional development.

"When learners are not given time to rest, their brains do not get opportunity to recover and process what has been learnt. This can lead to mental fatigue, reduced concentration, and eventually poor academic performance," he said.

She explained that continuous exposure to schoolwork without breaks may also increase stress levels among learners. "You begin to see signs like irritability, anxiety, lack of motivation, and even burnout. Some learners lose interest in school completely because they feel overwhelmed."

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