



Holiday makers learn shoe making in Namuwongo on Tuesday. PHOTOS/ IBRAHIM KAVUMA

WORLD WIDE

EDITOR'S PICK

Nyakecho's journey from a cleaner to an employer in Iganga

The power and fruits of resilience are evident in the life of Ms Robinah Nyakecho, a graduate who is currently pursuing an online Master's Degree in Education Computing at the American University of Beirut. She is the brain behind the Kecho-Agro-Processors company, found in the eastern Uganda District of Iganga. / P23



Students use holidays to acquire new skills

Making hay while the sun shines. As school holidays unfold, many students are turning spare time into opportunity, learning practical skills, discovering talents and helping support their families. From shoe-making workshops to sports grounds and busy markets, the break is increasingly becoming a training ground for survival, independence and preparation for the realities of adulthood.

BY SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

In a small shoe-making workshop in Namuwongo, teenage boys gather around an artisan, their attention fixed on his hands as he demonstrates how to rebuild a damaged sole. One by one, they take turns cutting leather, stitching through thick rubber, and learning how to apply glue without wasting material. It is a hands-on lesson, where every mistake is corrected on the spot, and every finished

shoe marks progress.

"When someone brings these shoes, I start working on them immediately," says Obeid Tebandeke, one of the holiday trainees at the workshop. "If I fix two or three pairs in a day, I earn something small. That's what I use for my basic needs and partial payment for my school fees. At least I don't have to keep asking everything at home."

Across Kampala and its surrounding communities, students are increasingly spending their holidays in workshops, sports grounds, markets and community spaces that turn the break into a period of exploration, self-discovery and for some, economic survival.

In many neighbourhoods, garages, salons and small enterprises have turned into informal training grounds.

In Katwe suburb, groups of teenage boys spend their mornings at welding workshops, learning how to cut and join metal under the watchful eye of a local artisan.

At a small roadside garage, the sound of metal clanging fills the air as 16-year-old Isaac Ssenabulya tightens a bolt beneath a car. His hands are greasy, his shirt stained, but his focus is unwavering.

"I come here every day to learn mechanics during the holidays and I get some money that I use as pocket money," he says. "I don't want to just stay at home doing nothing."

Also in Kansanga, in Makindye division, girls gather at a beauty salon, practising hair braiding and styling techniques on one another.

"These children come during holidays and ask to learn," said Ms Resty Ayebale, a salon owner in Kansanga. "Some pick these hands-on skills very fast and even start earning. It also helps us, especially during busy seasons like December because they increase our workforce," she added.

Parents, too, are increasingly encouraging this shift, seeing practical skills and talent activation as a safety backup plan in an uncertain job market.

"I don't believe in fully controlling how children spend their holidays," says Ms Jane Atwongyeire, a parent in Kampala. "Yes, I involve them in my work most of the holiday time so that they can know how to run a business, but I also give them space. At times, I take them to their relatives to learn home skills."

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Students embrace skills development

Talent identification.

The holidays provide an opportunity for students to identify and nurture talent, besides develop new skills.

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This trend is partly driven by broader economic realities. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (Ubos) Labour Market Survey 2025 report, unemployment has stagnated at 12.2 percent, while youth unemployment also remains high at 18 percent, with a higher rate among females (21 percent) compared to males (15.2 percent) being attributed to a mismatch between education and job market needs.

Not all students trade books for tools. In areas like Nakawa and Nsambya sharing hall, football pitches and basketball courts are buzzing with activity.

Groups of teenagers gather daily for friendly matches, informal training sessions, and club tournaments.

For 14-year-old Brian Anguyo, the playground is his main holiday destination.

"We play football every day and I eventually discovered my talent with the right people that can support it," he says. "It keeps me busy and I enjoy it."

Coaches say the holidays provide an opportunity to identify and nurture talent, with some students showing potential that could take them beyond recreational sport.

Home as the default space

For those without structured activities, home becomes the default holiday space.

In middle-income households, this often means a mix of chores, television, and long hours on smartphones. Without structured activities, days can blur into each other.

"I mostly stay home and help with housework," says Maria Tumusiime, a S.2 student in Seguku. "After that, I watch movies or chat with friends."

Markets and workplaces for survival



A holiday maker learns shoe-making skills in Namuwongo, a Kampala City suburb, last year. PHOTO/IBRAHIM KAVUMA

In contrast, some students spend their holidays in far more demanding environments. In busy trading centres like Owino and Kikuubo, learners can be seen assisting parents selling goods, carrying merchandise, and managing small stalls.

Ms Hadijja Mirembe says this is an opportunity to strengthen household income. Fifteen-year-old Amina says she spends her entire holiday at her mother's food stall.

"If I don't help, it becomes hard for us. With the added workforce, we earn more and sometimes I deliver the goods to clients where they are, which attracts more buyers," she explains.

This reality highlights a stark divide: while some students are exploring interests and talents, others are focused

on survival.

Guidance from experts

Asked about this, Mr Fagil Mandy, an educationist advises parents to take a deliberate role in shaping how children spend their holidays.

"Parents should have a clear programme of what they are doing and what the children are expected to do," he says. "Many children, especially those from boarding schools, lack basic knowledge of managing a home."

He adds that holidays should be used to teach life skills such as cooking, cleaning and home

management. Mr Mandy also encourages parents to expose children to life beyond their immediate environment.

"Children need to understand places beyond Kampala. Some reach university without knowing their own country or extended families. Visiting relatives helps them understand their roots and develop a sense of belonging," he explains.

Mr Dickson Tumuramy, a parenting coach further emphasises the importance of practical skills that nurture creativity and independence.

"In this era of artificial intelligence, we need skills that technology cannot easily replace. Vocational skills such as car-

penry, tailoring, crafts or cookery are essential. It is also important to expose children to workplaces so they understand how money is earned and appreciate its value," he says.

He adds that, "Children should be encouraged to read widely so they can broaden their perspective and integrity. Parents, too, should dedicate deliberate time to guide and mentor them during this long break and teach them every skill and be organized into pro-

Advice.

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duction."

However, Mr Tumuramy notes that while some have gained valuable skills or nurture talents, others risk missing out on both rest and structured development.

Religious places such as Churches and mosques are also playing a role in shaping how students spend their time.

Youth fellowships and camps are drawing in children for spiritual guidance, mentorship and structured activities.

"These programmes keep them engaged and away from bad influences," says Peter Tebukoza, a youth leader at St. Luke church Lweeza.

Even for those upcountry, the situation is not far removed from this reality. Some are turning to managing their parents' business, including riding bodas bodas, gardens, shops and cleaning vehicles at washing bays. It appears to be the new way to be on holiday - a way of getting ready for the world of work, after they are done with school.

Ugandan education is also shifting towards competence-based, practical skill acquisition to combat youth unemployment. Some students have already made successful initiatives in electronics, tailoring, and agricultural projects. This hands-on approach aims to bridge the gap between classroom theory and industry needs.

