

Education isn't only about good grades

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Performance might have little to do with real knowledge/skills attained and the ability to use that knowledge to solve daily problems. File PHOTO

In Summary

- When national exams results are released, it is not business as usual, especially for parents with children in candidate classes. The media is full of lists of best and worst performers. And parents will do anything to have their children on these lists.

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By Henry F. Mulindwa

End of year holidays are rarely relaxing for the majority of students who sit for national exams. The situation is not any better for their parents and guardians either.

Parents vastly over inflate the importance of exam results. The media doesnot refrain

from the results frenzy too! This kind of exam fixation is unhealthy both for the education system, the country and the individual.

Grades for sale

Grades have become a kind of currency. Some people think that if you want better grades, you should pay more school fees and the more you pay, the better the grades you expect because the better the grades, the better position in society later.

Schools will therefore drill students to the extent of having no break before the national exam is taken. In some schools, classes begin at 5am and run throughout the day. There are lessons even on Sundays.

School work is taken home even during holiday time. Children have no time to learn other things that are necessary in life, such as social skills, culture, knowing their extended families.

They are being coached for exams. The school with more first grades is considered to be the 'best school' even if its graduates cannot fix a mere broken light bulb. Good grades are prestigious! They are a sure way to progression to the next level. But one wonders whether they really have a thick link for future economic and social success and happiness.

Unfair competition

Economics has fully contaminated the education system. In the past, children would

come from rural primary schools and get into top schools because teachers in rural schools got paid like their counterparts in the cities. Today, it is unheard of.

It is thought that good grades come from schools where the fees is high.

At public universities, tuition grants or scholarships are mainly offered according to grades.

Sadly, they largely go to those who are able to pay for higher education because they attended expensive schools where grades can easily be attained, and unfortunately, sometimes even through cheating.

Narrowed down

Schools that used to offer a variety of programmes like music, tailoring, typing, horse riding, sports, farming, have long deserted those programmes because 'they do not sale'.

Parents are looking for academic grades if you want their money! The education industry that has private, profit-seeking investors, has turned grades into some form of currency. Grades signal success for individual pupils or students, for the school, the teacher and parents. And the unhealthy competition not to create something helpful but to be better than the other begins.

Good grades vs intelligence

Exams measure many incompatible things. Who is more intelligent between one who obtains a distinction in English language and the other who obtains it in History? Why

should a “B” in Chemistry be considered better than an “A” in Geography? Exams are like a theory test in driving. In the end what matters is driving safely.

No one cares about the scores in the test. You might find that one who scored highly is a poor driver on the road due to many intervening reasons such as the kind of road he is driving on, the condition of the vehicle, personal temperament, other drivers on the road, the medication he is on and so on.

I am not saying that the test is not necessary because it is, and it should be taken.

However, scoring “A” in it is not so important when it comes to safe driving on the real road. Yes, it is important to go to a driving school and do the test but the test should not be taken as if it will buy you a car!

Exams are necessary but not as important as we take them to be. They should not give pupils sleepless nights, denying them of time to learn life skills.

The Ministry of Education should not make exams a big deal and media should only give summaries.

“Best students” “Best School” phenomenon in newspapers and on TV, is not a good thing for our education. Parents run to media houses to have their children in newspapers, making them think they are better than everyone.

When things do not work out so well later in life, such a person is most likely to be highly disappointed, realising they are not the best in everything afterall.

Exams have little to do with education. They test how good we are at doing exams.

Relative performance might have little to do with real knowledge/skills attained and the ability to use that knowledge to solve daily problems.

I know some will say that knowledge is not just for solving problems. I would rather think that knowledge that does not help solve real, physical, political, aesthetic, religious, wonder problems is not worth spending our time and treasure on.

Ideal situation

During the term, for every three weeks of school, children in the UK have a week off-to assimilate what they have studied and create something from the knowledge and skills they have acquired.

The “most brilliant” child is one who solves a problem, who produces something, who invents something. While they do exams, they do not spend the whole year in school, preparing for the national exams. Still UK is ranked top of the countries with the best education system.

In Uganda, the brightest child is considered to be the one who can reproduce class material with nothing added! No wonder we have very few engineers and among them still very few are good! Usually they have no originality because they have never learnt to be original and independent thinkers. Many journalists are content with reporting events. They are incapable of investigation and analysis!

More to education than grades

While grades can help a bit, success is largely achieved by those who are nice, clever,

hard-working regardless of where and how and by whom they were educated. (I am deliberately leaving out the politically connected lot, because I do not consider ill-gotten riches as success).

Ironically, we know so many dull and lazy people who rise to the top with mystifying ease despite their academic mediocrity and poor grades.

This could mean that grades that seem to be so enormously important matter much less in life.

No one cares about your grades. You are more valued for your character as a friend, colleague, employee, spouse or parent. What is more important than grades is cultivating a character to enable one fit in society comfortably and usefully.

Exam results should not create a hullabaloo, giving unnecessary hypertension to students, teachers and parents.

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