

# Covid-19's impact on education didn't end when schools reopened

For more than 20 years, Kyambogo University has held its graduation ceremonies over several days, usually three to five days to accommodate the large number of students completing their programmes annually.

This year marks the 21st graduation ceremony yet unlike the previous years where Kyambogo graduated sizable cohorts of 11,721 students in 2024; 10,926 in 2023, and over 12,000 in 2022, the university has announced that the entire 2025 graduation will take only two days, the shortest in its history.

While Kyambogo has not yet released the exact number of graduands for this year's ceremony, the decision to compress what has traditionally been a multi-day event strongly suggests a significantly smaller cohort compared to the pre-pandemic pattern, where annual graduations often ranged between 6,400 and 12,800 students. This sharp contraction signals a deeper story about the long-lasting disruptions inflicted by the Covid-19 pan-

Families exhausted by economic hardship during lockdown could no longer prioritise tuition, leading many students to pause or abandon their studies entirely.

The pandemic did not merely delay academic calendars; it scattered thousands of learners into new realities that made returning to university nearly impossible.

The shrinking graduation numbers now reflect a national education recovery still in distress. Every student missing from this year's list represents not just a personal academic setback but a loss to the country's future workforce.

Uganda risks long-term shortages in critical skill areas like teachers, technicians, engineers, social workers, and specialists because the cohorts affected by the pandemic are exactly the ones who should be entering the job market now.

The reduced graduation duration at Kyambogo is, therefore, not merely an administrative adjustment but a subtle admission of how deeply Covid-19 altered the higher-education pipeline.

Compounding this challenge is the absence of a nationwide tracing mechanism to follow up on the learners who dropped out during the lockdown. Their whereabouts remain largely undocumented. Civil society organisations estimate that many are now in low-wage jobs, early marriages, or informal roles that lock them out of formal education permanently.

Without deliberate interventions such as flexible re-entry programmes, support for young mothers, financial recovery schemes, and community-based reintegration models, the country risks allowing an entire generation to slip away unnoticed.

As Kyambogo University prepares to graduate its noticeably smaller cohort in a record two days, the celebration carries an undertone of loss. Behind the gowns, speeches, and jubilation lies the silent shadow of students who should have been there but are not.

This year's brief ceremony stands as a reminder that Covid-19's impact on education did not end when schools reopened; it continues to shape futures and shrink opportunities. The two-day graduation is not only a historical first, it is a quiet alarm signalling the need to rebuild not just the education system, but also the disrupted lives it once held.

"A two-day graduation is not efficiency, it is absence."

Behind the gowns, speeches, and jubilation lies the silent shadow of students who should have been there but are not.



**Charlotte Ahimbisibwe**  
Covid-19

demic and the thousands of learners who never returned when schools reopened.

Uganda's education system suffered one of the longest Covid-19 lockdowns in the world, stretching close to two years. During this prolonged closure, many university students found their academic journeys interrupted in ways that became irreversible.

Lecturers recall how, when teaching resumed in 2022, classrooms that had once been full then had noticeable gaps, names missing, faces unseen, and hopes silently extinguished.