

The relationship between school holiday coaching and learners' morale and performance in national examinations in secondary schools in Keiyo South Sub-Country, Kenya

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Abstract

Irrespective of the consistent bans on holiday tuition by the Ministry of Education in Kenya, holiday tuition is still being practiced by secondary schools. This necessitated an investigation into the rationality of this practice. The study sought to investigate the influence of privatized holiday coaching on the teaching-learning process in secondary schools in Keiyo South sub-County. Based on the study, this paper examines teachers' perceptions on the relationship between school holiday coaching and learners' morale and performance in national examinations. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and was grounded on Social Learning Theory advanced by Vygotsky. The target population comprised all principals and teachers in the 35 secondary schools in Keiyo South sub-County. Since the number of secondary schools was considered low, all the secondary schools were selected for the study using census sampling technique. A total of 35 principals were purposively selected. Five teachers were randomly selected from each of the sampled schools yielding a sample size of 175 teachers. Questionnaire for teachers and interview schedule guide for principals were the main data collection tools. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed to assess the reliability of research instruments. Open-ended questions were analyzed through reporting emerging themes. The themes emerging from secondary data were identified to augment the primary data. Quantitative data was analysed descriptively. Study findings were presented in form of charts, graphs, and cumulative frequency tables. The study established that teachers perceive school holiday coaching as having a positive significance on learner morale and learners' performance in KCSE. The study recommends that the government needs to lift the ban on school holiday coaching and instead recognize, actively encourage and regulate the practice in secondary schools.

Keywords: Teachers, Perceptions, School Holiday Coaching, Learners Morale, Performance, National Examinations, Schools

Introduction

School holiday coaching is a global phenomenon. The practice is amplified in some parts of East Asia, particularly Japan, Republic of Korea and Taiwan in the 1960s (Bray, 2003; Silova & Bray, 2005) [17]. It has since cascaded rapidly to most urban areas in the rest of the world within a very short span of time. In some countries in East Asia, the practice has transformed into a macro enterprise (Bray, 2010) [1]. Justifications for the practice can be categorized basing on factors related to demand and supply.

Factors supporting school holiday coaching demand include high return rates, given the decisive role examinations play in influencing incomes, increased competition for admission into prestigious universities and lucrative careers, cultural factors; Confucian traditions, particularly the perceived role of effort in educational success amidst many Asian societies among others (Bray, 2013) [2]. From the supply perspective, factors justifying holiday coaching comprise inadequate classroom teaching, an overloaded educational curriculum and mediocre selection and evaluation mechanisms (Hallak & Poisson, 2007) [5].

According to Raffick (2004) [14], holiday coaching can take different forms and size of the classes can differ from country to country. Some tutoring is provided on one-on-one basis, home-based, small groups, coaching centres and in extensive theatre halls, home-based modalities, individually or in small groups at the tutor's or clients home.

School Holiday Coaching and Learner Morale

Bray (1999), Yoo (2002) [19] and Kwok (2004) [8] are in

agreement that school holiday coaching supplements the normal learning time of formal learning commercially. In the event of distinguishing remedial lessons for slow learners to improve achievement, it is at times undertaken off school premises.

Studies carried out in Asia justify school holiday coaching. It is believed that it supplements the normal teaching formal time. It also distinguishes remedial forms of teaching for slow learners to improve under-achieved subjects out of the school premises (Bray, 2003; Yoo, 2002 [19]; Kwok, 2004) [8]. In some instances, private tuition has been identified with remedial lessons or holiday tuition of which the former is conducted in the evening, morning and over weekends while the latter during the school holiday.

Marimuthu, Singh, Ahmed, Lim, Mukherijee and Oman (1991) [10] posit that through commercialization holiday tuitions have mostly been abused. A 1996 survey in Hong Kong posits that 25.65% of lower secondary students are privately tutored. In Malta, a survey conducted in 1997/98 on 1,482 pupils in lower and upper secondary established that 50.5% attended private tuition (Bray, 2003). Similarly, a 2007 survey in Japan reported 65.25% tutoring in junior secondary and at home.

Studies in Malaysia, Colombia, Taiwan and Egypt also indicate booming private tuition in urban areas than rural. This is because urban life is highly competitive and parents appreciate the value of education since they themselves are educated and can afford commercial tuition (Chew & Leong, 1995 [4]; Bray, 1999; Tseng, 1998; Fergary, 1994).

Private tuition is a growing phenomenon the world over

(Russell, 2002) ^[16] states that in the United Kingdom, through private tuitions, “a secret lessons revolution has taken place in state education”. Russell notes that in London and other major cities, private tutoring is common. It has become a significant yet unacknowledged factor in children’s performance (ibid.).

School Holiday Coaching and Learner Performance

Empirical studies have found a positive correlation between holiday coaching and learners’ academic performance. Stevenson and Baker (2012) argue that students’ participation in private coaching have increased the likelihood of university entrance in Japan. Overall, they found that students who reported that they had participated in private coaching during high school years showed a higher probability of attending universities in their first year following graduation from high school. For students in the first year out of high school, practice examinations and correspondence courses improved the probability of entering college by 16 percent and 25 percent, respectively, whereas having a private coach significantly reduced this probability, which reflects the remedial character of this form of private coaching in Japan. However, using the logistic regression, Stevenson and Baker (2012) failed to remove the bias caused by selectivity of private coaching participants. In addition, the student academic performance variable used in all regression models was problematic because it was likely to be endogenous, which means that it was correlated with unobserved student innate ability or motivation.

Similarly, Briggs (2011) examined commercial private coaching courses in the United States and tried to measure its effectiveness using the OLS method. He found that coaching increased SAT math scores by 14-15 points, SAT verbal scores by 6-8 points, and ACT math and English scores by 0-0.6 points, but decreased ACT reading scores by 0.6-0.7 points. Park, Park and Kim (2011) and Yang and Kim (2013) also argue that private coaching contributes to the improvement of the math and science scores in TIMSS 1999 using Hierarchical Linear Modelling (HLM).

Using multiple regression, Lee (2010) ^[9] claims that private coaching is one of the important factors that facilitates students’ academic achievement. Using path analysis, Kulpoo (2008) ^[6] and Polydorides (2014) also report positive correlations between private coaching and academic achievement of high school students in Mauritius and Greece, respectively. However, significant caveats of these studies are that either they do not control for school characteristics, which may bias the estimation results, or they do not use an appropriate method to observe the causal relationship.

Several studies have nonetheless found negative or no effect of holiday coaching on student outcomes. Han, Sung and Gil (2011) and Ban, Jung and Yang (2009) provide counter-evidence using regression analysis in which holiday coaching is not statistically significant in explaining academic achievement among students. Lee *et al.* (2014) have investigated the effect of pre-class tutoring on academic achievement of students who were enrolled in secondary schools in Korea. Pre-class tutoring is defined as private tutoring that teaches a school’s curriculum at least one month ahead of its schedule. This study concluded that pre-class tutoring has no short- or long-term effects on student academic performance in Korean language, English and Mathematics.

However, the study by Lee *et al.* (2014) also raises several concerns. The sampling procedure raises many doubts on whether or not it ensured a perfectly random sample. The authors seemed to have failed to account for differences in regional characteristics and student motivation, which affect both participation decision of private coaching and academic achievement. In addition, for the long-term analyses, the sample size was too small, which tends to lead to biased estimates.

Cheo and Quah (2010) and Ha and Harpham (2011) have also found insignificant effects of private coaching on student achievement. Cheo and Quah (2010) have conducted an analysis using multiple regression with students in grade 8 in three schools in Singapore and found negative and insignificant effects of private coaching. Similarly, using logistic regression, Ha and Harpham’s (2011) results show an insignificant effect of taking extra after-school classes on writing and numeracy for eight-year-old children in Vietnam. Some studies have examined the effect of private coaching based on the subjective answers of perceived academic improvement. Korean parents showed a strong trust in the effect of private coaching to the academic performance of their children (Paik, 2009; Yun, 2010). In addition, studies have shown that German and Japanese parents believe that private coaching plays a positive role in increasing academic achievement of their children (Kramer & Werner, 2008).

Njoki (2002), in a survey on effects of coaching on students’ academic performance in Gatundu South Sub-County, notes that private tutoring has many positive effects such as increasing human capital and providing constructive income for tutors. According to Njoki (2002), holiday tuition ensures excellent performance in national examinations thus generates expert manpower necessary in the national development, occupies students with learning when parents are busy working and unable to supervise their children’s preps, and also motivates teachers economically due to their poor remuneration.

Buchmann (2013) ^[3] has also found a positive impact of private coaching on students’ academic performance in Kenya. For 13- and 19-year-old students, private coaching reduces the chance of grade repetition and increased student academic performance.

Makworo (2009) observes that holiday tuition became necessary for every student as a bright student has to compete with other students to maintain their good scores while weak students have to struggle for high marks. Accordingly, coaching classes are necessary for students who find it hard to grasp a subject in school. Such classes facilitate individual attention hence motivate learners. This is emphasized by Reynolds and Jansen (2012) ^[15] who state that holiday tuition reduces the heterogeneity of student ability thus promoting excellence among weak learners; this may only be similar in a mixed gender school and may not be the case with that of single gender. However, it still denies children time for interaction during the holiday. Privatized coaching varies teaching approaches and methodology which favours weak learners and also promotes effective and early syllabus coverage resulting in overall academic performance (Makworo, 2009). Other benefits of holiday tuition include increase in learner achievement, school attitudes, peer acceptance and self image (Raynolds & Jansen, 2012). This could be true for education but still the learner’ social

achievement is curtailed. This may also lead to negative perception of domestic affiliation to education; peer interaction is cut off within the village rendering learners as social misfits.

All studies discussed so far have shown mixed evidence on the effect of private coaching on students' academic performance. Thus, it is still not clear whether there is a causal link between private coaching and learners' performance.

Statement of the Problem

School holiday coaching existed in Kenya before the introduction of the 8-4-4 system as a free service provided to the learners by their teachers. With the advent of the 8-4-4 system, the practice spread widely and became commercialized (Wanyama & Njeru, 2004) ^[18]. Holiday break is such a vital component of the learner's social right. This is also stipulated in the Education Act. Every learning session is alternated with a break to all the learners to contemplate on what they have been taught and apply it in their daily cultural situations. This is vital since the learner is allowed to interact and socialize with their environment to conceptualize their intellectual faculties to their immediate society. This has not been so since most learners are recalled back to a vigorous and strenuous learning session purported to improve the learner's capacity.

This perception is teacher based at the expense of the learner's freedom to relax and interact out of the normal learning session set for their playful activities to promote mental and social development. The Ministry of Education has constantly directed through the mass media and circulars that holiday coaching is banned for students in private and public schools (MOEST & HR, 1999 ^[11]; MOE, 2008) ^[12]. The Ministry has banned the extension of curriculum delivery into breaks, lunch, after-school hours, during the weekends and school holiday. It is an illegal way of providing education. The MOE argues that holiday coaching deprives children the opportunity to relax and learn social skills through interaction and socialization through play among themselves and with parents. However, there are indications that many schools still offer private tuition (Wanyama & Njeru, 2004 ^[18]; MOE, 2008) ^[12].

Nonetheless, there is a shortfall of knowledge on what really motivates school holiday coaching as perceived by teachers; teacher perceptions on the relationship between school holiday coaching, and syllabus coverage and teacher perceptions on the relationship between school holiday coaching and learners' performance in Kenya. It was, therefore, critical that a systematic study be carried out to investigate this practice and establish the gap behind this issue on student performance.

Materials and Methods

This study was carried out in secondary schools in Keiyo South sub-County in Elgeyo Marakwet County. Elgeyo

Marakwet County is located in the Rift Valley and constitutes 4 sub-counties (Marakwet East, Marakwet West, Keiyo North, Keiyo South). This area was chosen for the study since it was noted that, despite the Ministry of Education's ban on tuition, secondary schools in the sub-county have still been retaining students for holiday coaching. Besides, the performance of majority of schools in the sub-county in Kenya national examinations has been average at best. It was, therefore, found imperative that the study be conducted in this region to find out whether private coaching has any value to the teaching-learning process.

The study adopted a mixed methods research design using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The target population for the study comprised all principals and teachers in all the 35 secondary schools in Keiyo South sub-County. There were 35 secondary schools in Keiyo South sub-County (Keiyo South Education Report, 2014) at the time of the study. One of the schools was private while the remaining 34 were public. The student population stood at 9,569. At the time the study was conducted, there were 35 principals and 318 teachers in the 35 secondary schools.

Thirty-five (35) principals were purposively sampled. Five (5) teachers were randomly selected from each of the sampled schools yielding a teachers' sample of 175. Data was collected using questionnaire and structured interview schedules. A self completed structured questionnaire was designed appropriately for teachers. The structured questionnaire was meant to afford participants freedom of response. Interview schedules were used to obtain data from principals. Based on the data collection instruments, data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Open-ended questions were analyzed through reporting themes and quotas that emerged. The themes emerging from secondary data were identified to augment the primary data. Findings were presented in frequency tables, graphs and charts.

Results and Discussion

School Holiday Coaching and Learners' Morale

The study sought to establish the relationship between school holiday tuition and the morale of students in the instruction process as perceived by teachers. Principals and teachers were asked to respond to items that investigated the link between school holiday coaching and learner morale based on a five-point Likert scale. Respondents were required to indicate whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, strongly disagreed or were undecided about the stated items. Majority of the respondents (95.3%) were of the opinion that school holiday coaching enhances students' participation in group discussions. Besides, a significant proportion of respondents (92.2%) also indicated that students enjoy individualized teaching more during school holiday coaching.

However, there were mixed reactions over whether or not weak students appreciate holiday coaching and whether or not students develop more interest in the instruction process during holiday coaching. These results were as presented in

Table 1: Influence of School Holiday Coaching on Learner Morale

Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA
Weak students appreciate holiday coaching.	34(17.6%)	43(22.3%)	12(6.2%)	87(45.1%)	17(8.8%)
Students understand difficult concepts more during holiday coaching.	21(10.9%)	29(15.0%)	13(6.7%)	98(50.8%)	32(16.6%)
Students develop more interest in the teaching-learning process during holiday coaching.	11(5.7%)	44(22.8%)	35(18.1%)	47(24.4%)	56(29.0%)
Students are more enthusiastic to learn during holiday coaching.	17(8.8%)	16(8.3%)	32(16.6%)	63(32.6%)	65(33.7%)
Students participate in group discussions more during holiday coaching.	2(1.0%)	6(3.1%)	1(0.1%)	88(45.6%)	96(49.7%)
Students enjoy individualized teaching more during holiday coaching	1(0.1%)	9(4.7%)	5 (2.6%)	106(54.9%)	72(37.3%)

A principal interviewed during the study on teacher perceptions on the influence of school holiday coaching on learner morale stated as follows:

School holiday coaching has mechanisms of appreciating all learners in terms of their abilities. There is even more group discussions where all students have an opportunity to present what they know best as opposed to the normal class hours. This way, their morale is lifted...

Similarly, another principal affirmed that teachers viewed holiday teaching as an important component that enhances learner moral. The principal further observed that:

Holiday coaching makes learners more enthusiastic...in fact, weak students tend to gain more during this exercise.

Bray (1999) and Yoo (2002) [19] are in agreement that school holiday coaching supplements the normal learning time from formal learning though commercially and, therefore, enhances the interest of learners in the teaching-learning process.

However, a study conducted in Asia by Kwok (2004) [8] on the influence of school holiday coaching on learner morale indicates contrary results. Kwok states that holiday coaching

has nothing to do with enhancement of learner morale in the instruction process but is mainly motivated by monetary gains.

School Holiday Coaching and Learners’ Performance in KCSE

In establishing the effect of holiday coaching on students’ performance, the study sought to establish the most common subjects that are scheduled for holiday coaching in the sampled schools. Respondents listed eight subjects which they claimed were given priority in the holiday coaching timetable. These were Mathematics, English, Kiswahili, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Geography and History. Majority of the respondents, 187(96.9%), listed Mathematics as the most preferred subject for inclusion in the private holiday tuition, followed by Chemistry at 183(94.8%), Physics at 180(93.3%) and Biology at 177(91.7%). The least preferred subjects for inclusion in the holiday coaching timetable were Geography and History. Figure 1 below presents a summary of the responses.

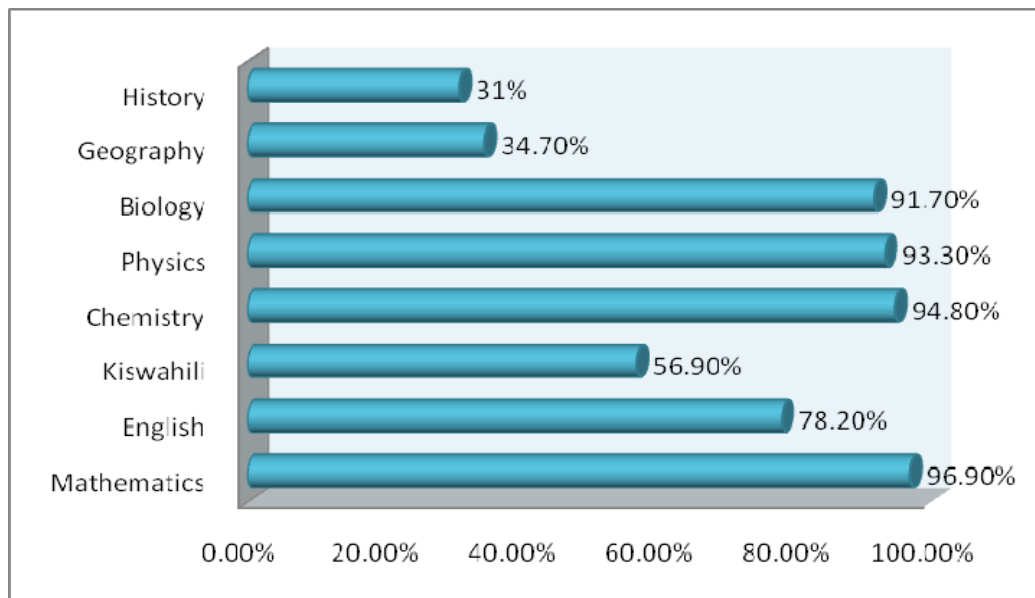


Fig 1: Subjects included in holiday coaching timetable

Figure 1 indicates that most schools in Keiyo South sub-County paid attention to Mathematics and science subjects during private holiday coaching. Majority of respondents indicated that this was alluded to the fact that these subjects were considered difficult by students and, therefore, required

more time to enable students comprehend their content. The study also sought to establish the mean performance of the subjects that were offered in private holiday coaching over the past five years. Table 2 summarizes the mean performance of the subjects.

Table 2: Subject Mean Performance of Coached Subjects in KCSE (2011-2014)

Subject	Year					Aggregate Mean
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Mathematics	4.6713	4.7521	5.1273	5.3452	5.6431	5.1078
English	5.1123	4.9563	5.4762	5.7783	6.0046	5.4655
Kiswahili	4.9341	4.9951	4.8763	5.1239	5.8762	5.1611
Chemistry	4.5895	4.8921	5.3218	5.4763	5.7621	5.2084
Physics	4.0041	4.4321	4.7654	4.9876	5.210	4.6798
Biology	5.231	5.0987	5.1123	5.2314	5.3478	5.2042
Geography	5.3456	5.7869	5.9954	6.1269	6.9435	6.0397
History	6.1239	5.6321	5.9978	6.2378	6.4536	6.0890

Source: Keiyo South Sub-County KCSE Analysis Report 2010-2014

From Table 2, it is clear that subjects that are given priority in holiday coaching indicate a steady improvement in performance albeit a few which present an erratic pattern. Respondents attributed this improvement to the sufficient time allocated to these subjects and as such students are in a better position to comprehend the respective contents of the subject content. Students, therefore, end up presenting

improved performance in the concerned subjects in national examinations.

On the contrary, subjects that were not given priority in holiday coaching either recorded dismal mean performance in KCSE or stagnated in the past five years, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Subject mean performance of non-coached subjects in K.C.S.E (2011-2014)

Subject	Year					Aggregate Mean
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Agriculture	5.6713	5.5511	5.1673	4.9439	5.0821	5.2831
Computer Studies	6.1100	6.0012	5.9430	6.1138	6.0016	6.0339
CRE	7.1238	7.1426	7.0112	6.9541	7.0219	7.0507
IRE	6.0321	6.0042	5.9745	5.9763	6.8321	6.1638
French	5.0911	5.0222	4.9689	4.9998	5.0264	5.0217
German	5.0001	4.9165	5.0101	5.0004	5.0297	4.9914

Source: Keiyo South Sub-County KCSE Analysis Report 2010-2014

Teachers were also asked to indicate the effectiveness of holiday coaching in enhancing students' performance in

national examinations. This was done basing on a five-point Likert scale. Table 4 presents a summary of the responses.

Table 4: Teachers' Perception on the Effectiveness of School Holiday Coaching on Students' Performance

Perception	Percentage (%)					Mean
	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)	
Coaching helps students to raise exam scores	0	3	82	93	15	3.622
Coaching improves students' interests	0	4	84	92	13	3.591
Coaching focuses on exams	0	3	41	83	66	4.098
Coaching provides exam tips	0	4	58	75	56	3.948
Coaching provides exam drills	0	3	56	96	38	3.876
Coaching helps to build students' confidence	1	6	46	87	53	3.959
Coaching helps students to develop revision strategies	1	8	55	84	45	3.849
Coaching promotes students' critical thinking	3	15	46	84	45	3.793
Coaching helps students to cover topics that are not covered in class	2	9	45	87	50	3.902

From the findings in Table 4, it can be deduced that majority of teachers believed that holiday coaching always helps students focus more on examination tricks (mean = 4.098) and, therefore, puts them at a better position to improve their academic performance. It can also be deduced that teachers believed that often, holiday coaching helps to build students' confidence (mean = 3.959) and provides students with examination tips (mean = 3.948). Generally, from the computed means, it is clear that teachers view holiday coaching as an important determining factor in students' academic performance in national examinations.

The findings of the study indicate that teachers consider holiday coaching a supplement to mainstream schooling that

can help students to excel in the national examinations. Overall, findings of the study also suggest that the frequency of holiday coaching does not mean that the society does not trust schooling. Teachers perceive holiday coaching as contributing positively to students' learning and hence to their overall performance in national examinations. The findings further show that teachers perceive holiday coaching to often or always focus on examinations. With respect to academic performance, majority of the teachers agreed that holiday coaching often helps students to raise their examination scores, improve students' ability, and provide examination drills. Although teachers' responses allude to the fact that holiday coaching explicitly aims at improving school grades

and students' performance, the study also analyzed teachers' perception of the effectiveness of private coaching in other aspects that influence the instruction process. The results indicate that holiday coaching often develops learning strategies, builds students' self-confidence and promotes students' critical thinking.

In the same way as the empirical studies reviewed earlier, the study found positive effects of private coaching on students' academic performance. Stevenson and Baker (2012), for instance, investigated whether students' participation in holiday coaching increased the likelihood of university attendance in Japan. Overall, they found that students who reported that they had participated in holiday coaching during high school years showed a higher probability of attending universities in their first year following graduation from high school. This finding indicates that indeed there is a positive influence of holiday coaching on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Keiyo South sub-County.

Conclusion

Holiday coaching is not a unique phenomenon in schools in Kenya only; it is a worldwide phenomenon with far reaching implications in the mainstream educational system. Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that holiday coaching exists and thrives in very competitive environments, in societies where people have placed very high premiums in education and where social and economic advancement are dependent on one's educational qualifications. Teachers believe that holiday coaching significantly influences learners' morale, syllabus coverage and learners' performance in KCSE examinations. Teachers also attributed the need for school holiday coaching to three main factors: economic, educational and social.

Recommendations

While holiday coaching has some disadvantages (exacerbation of educational inequalities if not monitored and regulated, burdening parents financially and overworking students), the advantages of holiday coaching such as constructively occupying students during free time and during holidays while their parents are at work, assisting students and schools to post good grades, assisting teachers to cover syllabuses and helping slow learners to work towards avoiding to be assigned grade E by KNEC are some of reasons the government ought to rethink on its ban policy on holiday tuition and come up with a national policy framework that would work to optimally utilize private coaching to the benefit of all secondary school students while eliminating its abuse. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the government needs to lift the ban on holiday tuition and instead recognize, actively encourage and regulate holiday coaching in secondary schools. This will boost learners' morale.

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