

# 270 teachers absent daily in Namutumba schools - report

Officials say absenteeism, coupled with the recruitment of incompetent teachers, is a major driver of the district's high examination failure rates.

BY RONALD SEEBE

A total of 270 teachers, representing 18 percent of the workforce in Namutumba District, absent themselves from duty daily, according to a Uwezo Uganda report.

The report titled "Are our children learning?" states that this trend leaves learners without the expected competencies and contributes to the district's poor performance in national examinations.

The report says absenteeism persists partly because some school administrators and teachers have deliberately disengaged from the automated attendance system.

Speaking during a district public dialogue organised by Uwezo Uganda at Namutumba District headquarters last Thursday, Mr Simon Muwuliza, the district education officer-in-charge of Special Needs Education, said teacher absenteeism is a long-standing challenge.

Mr Muwuliza said absenteeism, coupled with the recruitment of incompetent teachers, is a major driver of the district's high examination failure rates.

"Even though they might be present in the school, many of today's digital teachers are graduating from colleges without knowing how to teach, prepare lesson plans, or scheme work," Mr Muwuliza said.

He added that discussing teacher absenteeism without addressing its underlying causes continues to undermine the education sector.

"As the education office, we are aware of these challenges, but the lack of provision for teachers' basic needs lowers motivation and makes regular school attendance difficult."

The District Internal Security Officer



Namutumba District Head quarters in Namutumba Town. PHOTO/RONALD SEEBE

(Diso), Mr Gilbert Ninsiima, said: "Out of 1,500 teachers, only 1,230 attend school every day."

He attributed the absenteeism to failure by inspectors of schools and head teachers to conduct their duties.

"This means inspectors are not doing their job; they're not reaching schools. It also means that in Namutumba, all 109 head teachers in government primary schools are not attending school every day. And because they are absent, many classroom teachers lack immediate supervision," Mr Ninsiima said.

Mr Nathan Nkenga, the executive director of the Nsinze Sub-county HIV/Aids Workers Association (NSHAWA), stressed the need to address the root causes of absenteeism to find lasting solutions.

Mr Aggrey Lugenyi, head teacher of Upper Primary School in Namutumba Town Council, linked the district's poor exam results to incompetence among lower-primary teachers, resulting in learners failing to acquire foundational competencies.

"Sometimes we wonder whether the digital teachers employed in Namutumba actually went through teacher

training colleges; some lack the basics expected of a good teacher," Mr Lugenyi said.

He added: "Our tutors in teacher training colleges must help us by producing competent teachers."

He said when a child leaves lower primary school without basic reading and writing skills, it becomes difficult to teach them in upper primary.

However, teachers cited low pay, poor working conditions, lack of accommodation, and high pupil-teacher ratios as key factors increasing their workload and stress levels, leading to absenteeism and reduced instructional time.

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- Mr Gilbert Ninsiima, Diso.

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A teacher, who requested anonymity for fear of victimisation, said some teachers abscond from duty because of poor working conditions.

"Some teachers deliberately stay away because their head teachers are often absent, leaving deputy head teachers to manage the schools," she added.

Mr Peter Mwesigwa, another teacher, told *Daily Monitor* that overcrowding in lower-primary classes is a major challenge.

"We have schools where Primary One and Two classes have over 400 pupils. Teaching such a large number is extremely difficult because pupils cannot concentrate," Mr Mwesigwa said.

Ms Sarah Nangobi, a resident of Namutumba Town Council, said many teachers now engage in part-time work to supplement their income, attributing absenteeism to this.

The district communications officer, Mr Noah Kiire, said the district would set a committee to investigate teacher absenteeism and take appropriate action.