

The 2024 Uwezo report reveals that while more children are accessing education, many are not acquiring basic numeracy and literacy skills.

BY BILL OKETCH

Oyam District in northern Uganda is facing a crisis in its education sector, despite improvements in pupils' enrolment.

The 2024 Uwezo report reveals that while more children are accessing education, many are not acquiring basic numeracy and literacy skills.

For instance, a majority of children in Primary Three were not able to do Primary Two work.

Even by the end of the primary cycle, half of the children were unable to do Primary Two reading.

In August 2024, Uwezo Uganda assessed 737 children aged four and above, from 298 households in Oyam, on basic English literacy and numeracy skills.

Uwezo also visited 14 schools out of the 109 government-aided primary schools in the district.

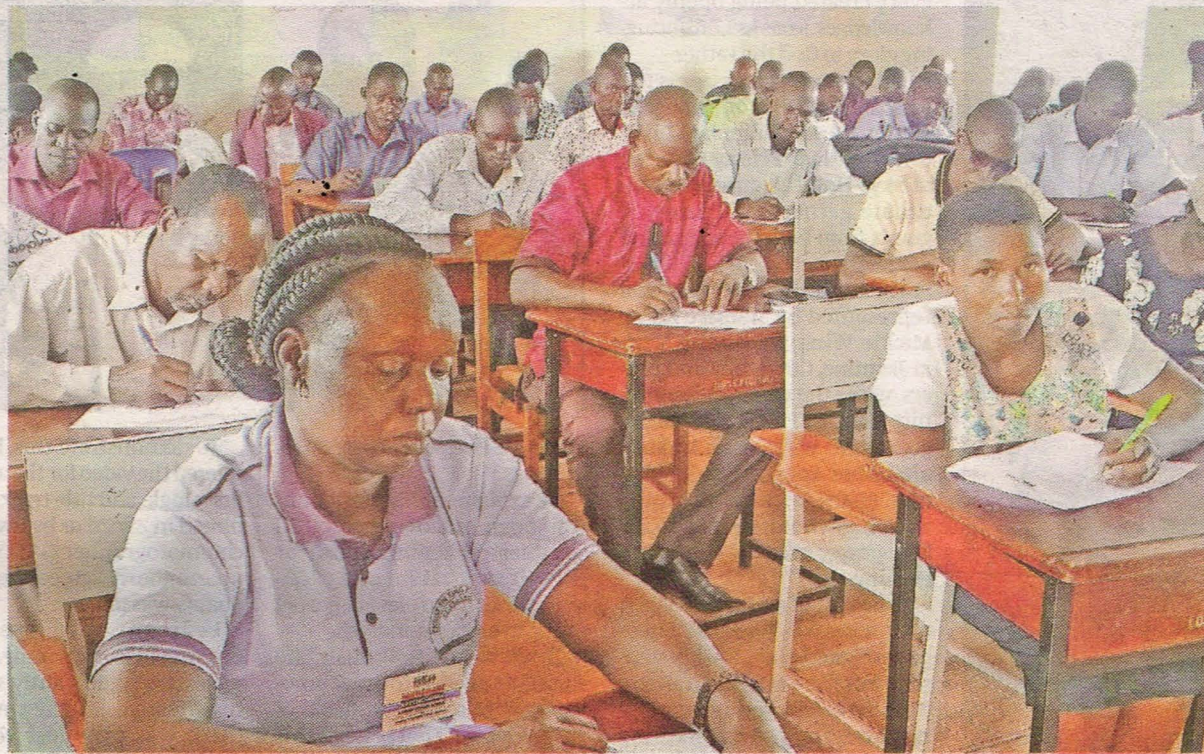
Nationally, data from Uwezo indicates that additional years of pre-primary education significantly improve a child's chances of achieving reading and math proficiency. However, in Oyam, most children do not attend pre-primary school.

Classroom conditions are also alarming. The average pupil to teacher ratio in the 14 schools visited stood at 88:1, far above the national target of 53:1, with the worst case recorded at 129:1.

Teacher presence is central to effective learning, yet Uwezo recorded an average 12 percent teacher absenteeism in Oyam on the day of the survey.

Commenting on why many learners cannot handle lower-class work, Mr David Adea, the district education officer, says: "A child is assumed to have passed, but I don't know the criteria used for promoting them to Primary Three... The Uwezo report shows that 12 percent of the teachers are always absent, translating to poor syllabus or

Uwezo report paints bleak picture of Oyam education



Teachers from schools in Oyam, Kole and Alebtong districts attend a capacity building training at Loro Core PTC, Oyam District, on March 24. PHOTO/BILL OKETCH

curriculum coverage."

He adds that although the report does not address pupil absenteeism, it remains a serious issue, especially in rural areas.

He says some children dodge school to work on farms for wages, citing some business people in Minakulu who have farms in Nwoya. He says some of these business people entice children to board their vehicles in the morning to go and work in their gardens in Nwoya.

"Some children board these vehicles and go to Nwoya during harvest time. Parents think their children are in school, yet they are in the gardens looking for money. In the evening, they put on their uniforms and return home," Mr Adea says.

Ms Victoria Harriet Anyango, the programme manager for education at the Foundation for Inclusive

CONSEQUENCES

- Learners are progressing through the system without mastering basic skills, compromising their future prospects.
- The lack of foundational literacy skills limits opportunities for further education and employment.

Community Help (FICH), says government-aided schools actually have more qualified teachers than private schools.

"But why are [private schools] performing better than government-aided schools?" she asks.

Mr Denis Omara, chairperson of head teachers in Abok Sub-county, explains

that private schools typically teach smaller classes:

"In public schools, the pupil to class ratio is 150:1, while in private schools it is 19:1 or 24:1. That gives a teacher more time to support learners individually."

Mr Patrick Okada Opito, principal of Loro Core Primary Teachers' College, adds that while teachers are trained well, they often adopt negative habits once deployed.

"They go out when they're 'hot', but those in the field influence them through laziness," he says.

He described teachers who appear present but do not teach, as "those absent from within." He says these teachers only occupy classrooms without giving instruction, and others pretend to prepare lessons but work on personal matters. He emphasises the need for stricter supervision and

accountability from head teachers.

The inspector of schools, Mr Benson Ongom, says for success and quality in education to be realised, it requires collective efforts from all relevant stakeholders.

"It costs money and other resources to promote quality education," Mr Ongom says.

This year, a total of 177,695 learners, 91,230 boys and 86,465 girls, were enrolled in Oyam's 109 government-aided primary schools. The district also has 86 private primary schools, 10 public and six private secondary schools, and three tertiary institutions.

Oyam District's strategic objectives include guaranteeing universal and equitable access to quality education through Early Childhood Development and Universal Primary Education, and improving literacy and numeracy outcomes as assessed by NAPE.

Additional goals include strengthening human capital, building a skilled and ethical workforce, and reducing vulnerability and gender inequality.

Yet the reality is grim. Half of all Primary Seven pupils cannot read a Primary Two story, underscoring a severe learning gap.

Oyam District has a shortage of 510 teachers, leading to high pupil to teacher ratios and inadequate individual attention. Oyam has 1,590 teachers, including 1,064 males and 526 females, against the required 2,100 teaching staff.

Teacher and pupil absenteeism is rampant, disrupting the learning process.

Some parents have a negative attitude towards education, undermining its importance.

The district officials say funding is inadequate. The Oyam inspector of schools says because of the inadequate resource envelope, the district constructed only one block of two classrooms at Amati Primary Schools using the School Facilities Grant.