

Pallisa P3 pupils can't read despite promotion – report

PALLISA. A new learning assessment conducted by UWEZO, in collaboration with the Citizens Initiative for Democracy and Development-Uganda (CIDD-UG), has revealed that the majority of Primary Three (P3) pupils in Pallisa District are unable to perform Primary Two (P2) level work.

The 2024 UWEZO Uganda Learning Assessment Report, released to district leaders on Monday, highlights alarming gaps in foundational literacy and numeracy, showing that most P3 pupils cannot complete reading or counting tasks expected of P2 learners.

The August 2024 survey assessed 920 children aged four and above from 300 households, and included visits to 14 schools across the district.

According to the report titled "Are Our Children Learning?", even by the end of the primary cycle, a significant proportion of learners still failed to meet P2 reading proficiency levels.

Only one percent of P3 pupils demonstrated competence in English reading. The figures rise gradually in higher classes: six percent in P4; 12

percent in P5; 39 percent in P6 and 78 percent in P7.

In numeracy, 21 percent of P3 pupils showed basic competence, compared to 31 percent in P4; 50 percent in P5; 64 percent in P6 and 83 percent in P7. Competence in both English and Mathematics stood at just one percent in P3; increasing to 65 percent by P7.

The study also revealed that only 26 percent of children aged two and above had accessed early learning. Nationally, the data suggests that additional years of pre-primary education significantly increase a learner's likelihood of achieving reading and numeracy proficiency. In Pallisa, however, access remains low, and 13 percent of learners did not progress to the next grade, despite Uganda's automatic promotion policy.

Presenting the findings, the CIDD-UG research officer, Mr Francis Okiror, said many learners could not read or write.

"In Primary Three, only one percent of learners assessed could read and comprehend a Primary Two story in

English," he said. He added that by P5, only 12 percent could understand a P2-level story in the local language.

Education officials and district leaders expressed concern.

District Inspector of Schools John Opedun said the sector faces deep-rooted challenges. He revealed that while automatic promotion is often blamed for poor performance, other issues such as overcrowded classrooms, limited nursery education and the high pupil-teacher ratio are significant contributors.

"We need to identify these challenges. The teacher-pupil ratio is still lack-

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ing, compounded by low nursery education," Mr Opedun said, adding that many parents cannot afford nursery school requirements.

However, he said the government plans to establish Early Childhood Development Centres and has instituted systems to track teacher absenteeism.

The District Community Development Officer, Ms Hallima Nyemera, said poor performance is linked to multiple social challenges.

"We need joint efforts from all stakeholders. An ordinance compelling parents to provide lunch and basic scholastic materials is necessary," she said.

Opwateta Primary School head teacher Beatrice Imesa said many parents send children to school without essential materials.

"Parents have a negative mindset about education. They just produce and dump their children at school," she said.

She also cited disparities in salary enhancements, noting that "teachers are not motivated because of huge loan debts".

The head teacher of Kagoli Primary School, Mr Moses Okiring, said parental involvement has declined.

"Parents tend to shift their children from school to school. This affects learning," he said.

Kalapata Primary School head teacher Peter Anguria said some religious sects discourage school attendance, while political pronouncements against charging fees in UPE schools have "crippled learning".

The UWEZO communications officer, Ms Judith Nyakaisiki, said the organisation remains committed to supporting improved education outcomes.

CIDD-UG Executive Director Fred Ejautene said the dialogue aimed to foster evidence-based engagement among education stakeholders to strengthen collective action for better learning.

The CIDD-UG Programme Manager, Mr Moses Kagwa, said 19 percent of teachers were absent during the survey.

"When teachers are absent, children receive less instructional time, negatively affecting their learning," he said.