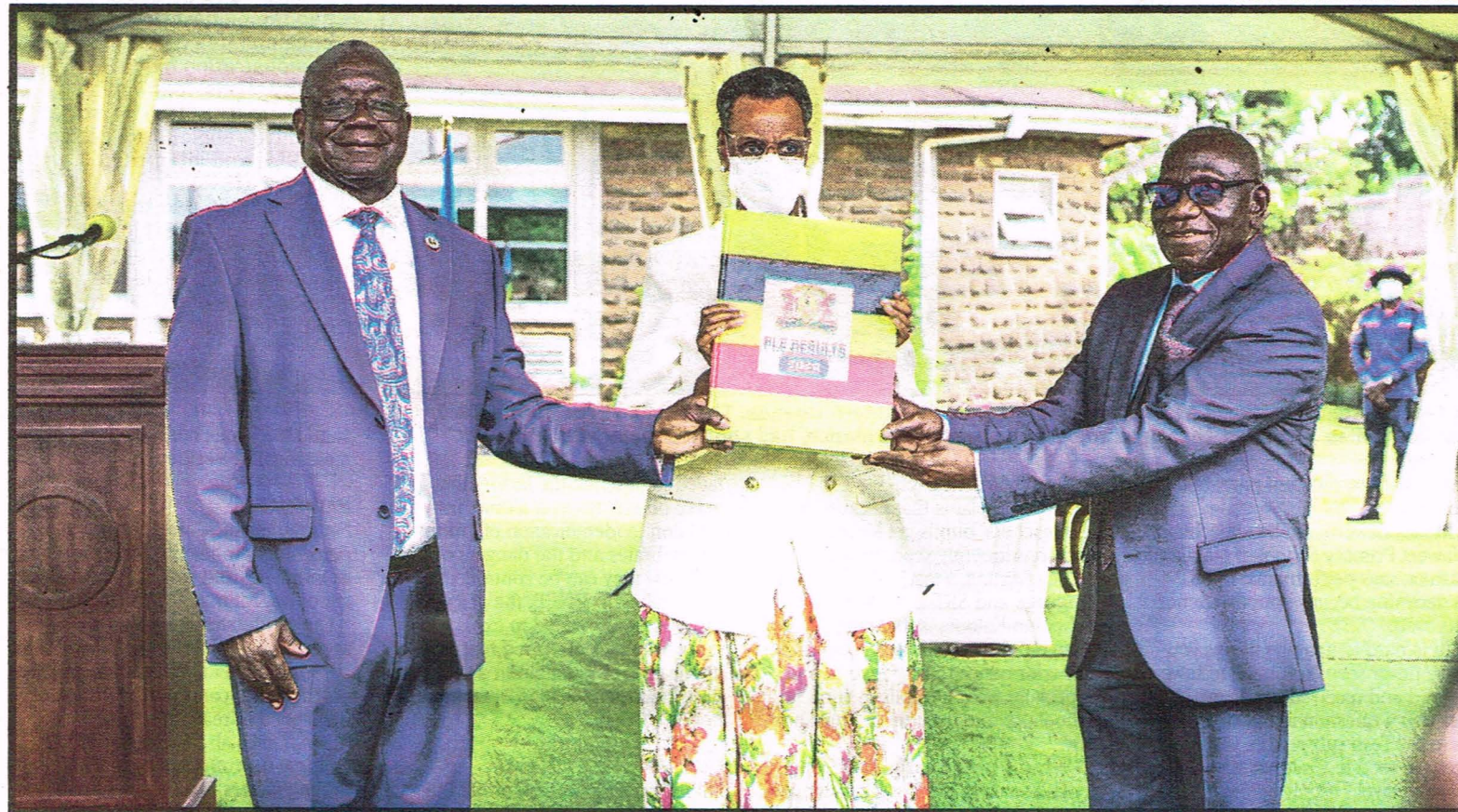


MWALIMU

PHOTO BY MIRIAM NAMUTEBI



The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni, receives 2025 PLE results from the executive director of UNEB, Dan Odongo (left) and UNEB chairperson Prof. Celestino Obua at State House Nakasero in Kampala on January 30

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Low civic awareness?

For decades, social studies (SST) was among the best done subjects in Primary Leaving Examinations. Shockingly, however, SST was the worst done subject according to results that were released last week, writes **MARTIN KITUBI**

While performance in mathematics and English improved in last year's Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE), the country was shocked that social studies (SST), a hitherto highly passed subject, was the worst done.

According to 2025 PLE results that were released last week, poor performance in SST denied many candidates a chance to pass in

Why performance in SST declined

Division One.

According to the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) data, only 3.3% of the 807,460 candidates who sat for the 2025 SST paper, scored a distinction, a drop from 7.9% in 2024.

Additionally, 62.7% of the candidates also scored at least a credit in the 2025 SST examination, compared to 75.6% in 2024.

Relatedly, only 15.9% of the 807,460 candidates who sat the SST paper in 2025 PLE, had a higher ability to use the facts to answer questions.

The data shows that the majority (67.8%) had a medium ability while 16.3% had a lower ability.

According to a UNEB report on PLE performance, the pupils failed the

easiest questions, while passing the hardest ones.

While children sing the national anthem at least twice a week while in school, the majority failed to answer a question that required them to list the lessons from each of the three stanzas of the Uganda national anthem.

QUESTIONS ON ELECTIONS

Although the PLE candidates sat the examinations during a campaign period, which are heavily broadcast and talked about, many learners could not name materials used in the elections.

The candidates also failed to explain how people can survive (adaptation methods) by promoting farming in arid or semi-arid conditions,

application of knowledge on factors that influence climate as well as factors of production.

The candidates, including those in Sebei, Teso and Karamoja, who use donkeys for transport, also failed to explain the factors that influence the use of animal transport.

As if that is not enough, children do not know their rights and several candidates failed to explain how children can participate in promoting their own rights.

Despite the fact that Uganda is a heavily religious country, with tens of thousands of churches and mosques, many children did not know the messages that some personalities in the Bible or Quran preached under religious education.

Relatedly, children could not list ways of promoting peace in the African traditional society, let alone ways of protecting our political independence.

UNEB ON FAILURES

Dan Odongo, the UNEB executive director, said the board was puzzled that learners do not know much about Uganda and the environment.

He attributed this mismatch to the way learners are taught, explaining that they are not exposed to information about Uganda.

"It is puzzling to all of us. We think issues to do with our country are not emphasised. We would not imagine that children would even fail to name election materials despite the fact that campaigns were all-over the media. Many children did not know about ballot papers," he said.

Odongo also attributed the failures to the examination setting adopted by UNEB, which emphasises application of facts as opposed to cramming and reproducing them.

"When you read the question papers, you see that emphasis on application and several failed because of this slight change. Even for religious education questions, many of them knew the actual facts, but they could not apply the importance or lessons," he said.

Odongo made the remarks on Friday in an interview with *Mwalimu* after the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni, released the 2025 PLE results at State House Nakasero in Kampala.

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POOR PERFORMANCE REGISTERED IN SST

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NEW SETTING SYSTEM

While referring to the UNEB examination for the 2025 PLE series which emphasised competence, Mrs Museveni noted this approach tests not just knowledge, but understanding and application of facts alike.

"The examination emphasised the competency-based learning approach that the country has adopted, and the questions tested knowledge, understanding and application of the knowledge to solve problems in the community," she said.

The minister said this approach ensures that the learners adapt to the competency-based curriculum at O'level. Mrs Museveni asked teachers to adjust their teaching methods to fit the new realities of competency-based teaching and assessment.

TEACHERS SPEAK OUT

Julius Tomanya, a teacher at Kitara Primary School in Hoima city, says SST is based on facts. He notes that the current generation hardly pays attention to issues in their country.

"Their interest is in other things like football and movies. No one can be taught how to reason," he says.

Tomanya also blames stakeholders for changing the syllabus without informing teachers who have to handle the children.

"We teach this; in the exam, they bring other things, so as teachers we are left puzzled," he says.

Tomanya notes that this would have been resolved through workshops, though some schools hardly value workshops which bring together



A teacher teaching pupils at a rural primary school in eastern Uganda. The decline in performance in social studies, a subject that used to post the best performance, has shocked many educationists

teachers from different parts of the country.

Moses Ecweru, the headteacher of Naweet Primary School in Nabilatuk district, says performance in SST is declining because pupils are not exposed.

"It is hard to imagine things you have never seen. You need to have moved and received exposure. If they ask you a question about vegetation in the Teso sub-region, you need to have seen it. Children nowadays hardly travel," he says.

Ecweru says SST requires teachers to be up to date with current affairs.

"Many teachers don't like it. Some schools in Karamoja have about two SST teachers who cannot cater for the

entire school," he says.

Ecweru explains that because of a few teachers, pupils get less attention and consequently score poor results.

Lucy Fairline, a teacher of English language and SST at Mukole Primary School in Katooke sub-county, Kyenjojo district, attributed the decline in performance to language barrier, especially among pupils in rural schools, where mastery of English is low.

"When I looked at the final paper, it looked so easy, but I was so surprised after the results were released," she says.

OTHER SUBJECTS

For integrated science, the candidates

failed to describe the factors that make objects float on a fluid, in addition to identification of groups of invertebrates and the dangers of fire and how they can be controlled.

According to UNEB, the candidates also failed to explain the responsibilities of a good first aider, application of radiation in a thermos flask, and identification of features of honey combs.

ENGLISH

UNEB noted in its report that the candidates had a limited vocabulary and that many struggled to re-write sentences.

The candidates also failed to use given homophones (words that

GENERAL PERFORMANCE

According to UNEB, English had the highest percentage of candidates (18.5%) demonstrating higher ability levels, followed by mathematics (16.4%), social studies/ religious education (15.9%) and integrated science (15%).

In addition, two-thirds of the candidates exhibited medium ability level in all four subjects, while the percentage of candidates who exhibited lower ability levels was about the same in all the four subjects at 16%.

sound the same, but with different meanings) in a sentence.

MATHEMATICS

For mathematics, applying percentages in real life situations such as in buying and selling items, was a tag of war for many of the candidates.

The candidates also failed to apply angle properties and using appropriate notations to state bearings of places, the concept of distance, time and speed in real life situations.

Candidates also found it difficult to apply the remainder arithmetic, finding factors of a number and representing given information on a Venn diagram.

Additional reporting by Ibrahim Ruhweza