

PLE results: Why rural learners

A total of 77,080 (9.55 percent) candidates out of the 807,313 who sat for PLE failed the exams and majority of these candidates are from rural schools.

BY MONITOR TEAM

On January 30, the Uganda National Examinations Board (Uneb) released the 2025 Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) results, indicating a slight performance improvement compared to the previous year.

However, a total of 77,080 (9.55 percent) candidates out of the 807,313 who sat for exams completely failed the papers compared to 64,252 (8.2 percent) in 2024, indicating an increase of 12,829.

The majority of candidates who failed the exams completely are from rural schools.

For example, Oyam District, in northern Uganda, is ranked among the worst-performing districts.

Out of 5,702 candidates, only 171 passed in Division One, a dismal showing that highlights deep-seated issues.

According to our computation, the numbers are alarming: 90 schools in the district did not get a single candidate with a first-grade, and 1,282 candidates failed.

Even more concerning, 96 learners did not show up for the exams, a worrying trend that suggests systemic problems.

Mr Anthony Nam, the head teacher of Aloni Primary School, Iceme Sub-county in Oyam County North Constituency, pointed out that inadequate capacity building of teachers on their areas of weaknesses coupled with a high teacher-pupil ratio, has further exacerbated the situation.

Mr Patrick Okada Opito, the principal of Loro Core Primary Teachers' College, highlighted that the problem starts with the teachers they produce.

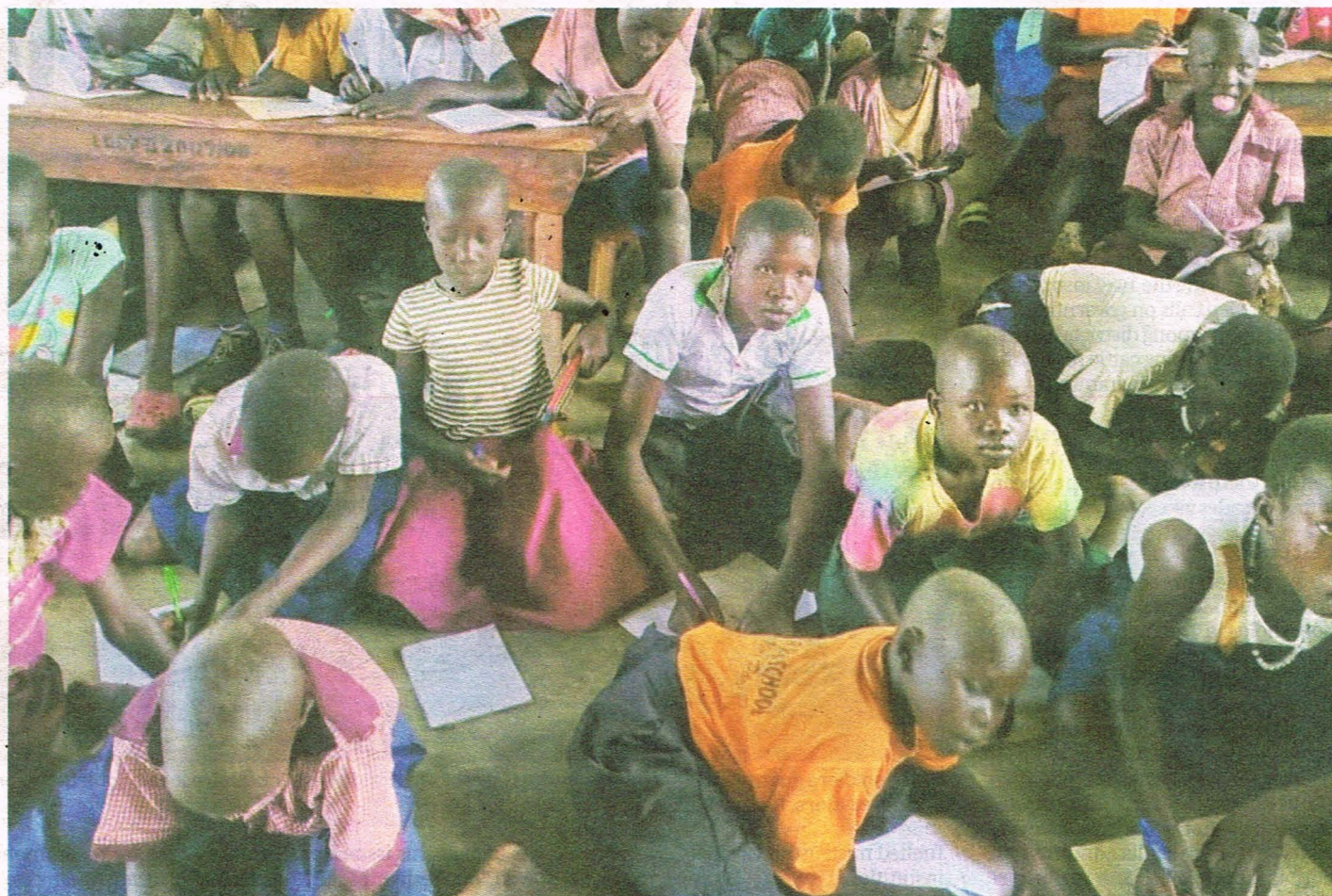
"When these teachers come, we train them very well. Of course, as they go out, they go when they're hot. Now, when they reach those places [work stations], teachers there influence them through laziness," says Mr Okada.

Another category is those teachers who prefer to be seen by their supervisors – the head teachers – but do nothing.

"Those are the ones called absent from within. They are absent, but it will take you time to know that they are absent because they report daily to school, but they don't go to the classroom. Then, there are those who go to class just to occupy the class because the head teacher wants them to go to class. So, those are 'occupying' teachers," Mr Okada explains.

The Oyam District Speaker, Mr Norman Otyeno, says the phenomenon of "schooling without learning" is blamed on several factors, including inadequate classrooms and desks, limited funding, inadequate manpower, and a lack of qualified, motivated teachers, pupil, and teacher absenteeism.

"Because we have too many numbers in the class, and our learners are not learning, so they (children) feel going there is like a waste of time. The policy is more like keeping a child at school for years, but the child is not learning because, yes, they go to school, but have they learnt?" he says.



Pupils attend lessons at Kanasia Primary School in Yumbe District. There is a shortage of desks at the school, forcing many pupils to sit on the floor. PHOTO/ROBERT ELEMA

Madi-Okollo and Obongi districts in the West Nile Sub-region are grappling with poor performance in the PLE, with Madi-Okollo registering only one candidate in Division One and Obongi having two.

According to records from the education department, Madi-Okollo District registered 1,791 candidates.

Out of these, one learner passed in Division One, 305 in Division Two, 645 in Division Three, 274 in Division Four, 506 failed the exams, while 60 learners missed some exams.

A Primary Seven candidate is deemed to have passed the exams if he/she garners between Aggregate 4 and 28. Usually, government schools implementing free education programmes take all candidates with an aggregate between 4 and 28.

Area leaders have blamed the downward trend of performance in the district on unfavourable learning environment, poor parental attitude, inadequate teachers, high pupil ratios, and last year's teachers' industrial action.

Mr Fred Ayikobua, the chairperson of social services in Madi-Okollo District, says the trend of the performance in the district has been downward over the past three years, an issue that is worrying the leaders.

"The learning environment where we are, from family setup to community, doesn't value education, especially in providing scholastic materials, school fees, school feeding, and psycho-social support. Some of our government schools are in a poor state where learners still sit on the floor while others learn under trees," he says.

Ms Jane Rose Abiko, the councillor for Inde Town Council, says: "Our communities do not value education yet, and this being a fishing community, most learners prefer fishing during school time to studying."

In Arua City, Mr Ronald Drani, the senior education officer, says the poor performance will affect the development of the sub-region.

He blames the teachers' industrial action of last year for the poor performance.

"The curriculum reforms are very useful, but most teachers have failed to adapt to the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in primary schools, causing a mismatch. Some are still teaching using traditional curriculum, like the use of textbooks, subject-specific, among others," he says.

The Kabale District Education Officer, Mr Moses Bwengye, says family background, absenteeism, insufficient teaching materials, lack of meals, and less exposure are some of the reasons why most pupils from rural primary schools perform poorly compared to those in urban primary schools.

"The level of understanding for the parents in urban areas is high compared to those in rural areas, some of whom do not value education to an extent that they force their children to stay home to help them with domestic work," Mr Bwengye says.

"Some pupils in rural schools study on an empty stomach, unlike those in urban schools who are fed on breakfast, lunch, and supper. Pupils in urban primary schools have many people to inspire them, unlike those in rural areas. Urban schools have better infrastructure that provides a conducive teaching and learning environment compared to those in rural areas," Mr Bwengye adds.

The Kanungu District Education Officer, Mr Adam Shaban, attributes the poor performance of pupils in rural schools to a poor attitude coupled with a lack of self-confidence, thus hindering academic excellence.

"The majority of pupils in rural



Parents' role.

Most parents have neglected their responsibilities because they are deceived into believing that the government caters for everything under UPE. Most of our schools are performing better because parents have agreed to contribute to their children's education. We can recruit enough teachers, put in place the necessary infrastructure, and buy enough scholastic materials."

Rev Agasha Muhwezi, diocesan education officer of Ankole Diocese

schools do not put on shoes, while many of them do not know how to use the instruments in a mathematical set. Poor teaching and learning environments equally affect the academic performance of pupils in rural schools compared to those in urban areas, who are transported in their parents' cars or school vans from home to school and back home," he says.

Mr Robert Cheptook, the executive director of Kapchorwa Civil Society Organisation Alliance (KACSOA), says public schools need to do more by giving learners extra assignments and tests so that they get familiar with exams.

"We need to boost the morale of teachers by improving their salaries and also implement school feeding programmes," Mr Cheptook says.

In Kapchorwa District, out of the total 1,383 candidates who sat the exams, 20 candidates got Division One, 413 were in Division Two, and 387 got Division Three.

Daily Monitor learnt that in the hilly district of Kapchorwa, pupils face several challenges including absenteeism of teachers, limited classrooms, and lack of reading and instructional materials.

The 2024 Kapchorwa District report card, conducted by Uwezo in partnership with KACSOA, revealed that only 25 percent of the pupils from Primary Three to Primary Seven are competent in both English and Math.

According to the report, the majority of pupils in Primary Three were not able to do Primary Two work.

The findings are also contained in a report that was carried out between the months of June and August 2025. It assessed 668 learners aged four and above from 300 households on Basic English literacy and numeracy skills.

Mr Cheptook says the teacher-to-pupil ratio, which stands at 83:1 needs to be

get poor grades



Pupils of Kayunga Girl's Primary School line up for lunch in September, 2025. PHOTO/FRED MUZAALE

addressed if academic improvement in the schools is to be achieved.

"Low pupil: teacher ratios are key for children's learning. The pupil: teacher ratio in most schools visited in Kapchorwa was 83:1," he says. The Uganda national teacher-to-pupil ratio is approximately 1: 43.

The teachers in government schools also blame low literacy levels among learners on several factors, including child labour and cultural activities, and also accuse parents of failing to provide food for their children.

"Parents are negative on school feeding, and you cannot expect a child to study on an empty stomach. The children are also kept at home to do garden work, especially during harvesting season for coffee and uprooting of Irish potatoes," One of the teachers, who preferred anonymity, told *Daily Monitor*.

Mr John Yeko, a retired head teacher and an opinion leader, says: "The government should provide meals on be-

2025 PLE RESULTS

Out of the 807, 313 candidates who sat the PLE exams from 15,388 examination centres, 91,990 (11.39 percent) passed with first grade compared to 84,301 in 2024.

It should be noted that the candidature increased by 20,332 compared to the previous year.

Of the total number of candidates (807, 313) who sat the exams, 730,233 (90.45 percent) passed and can proceed to Senior One, compared to 722,730 (91.8 percent) in the previous year.

A total of 388,293 candidates passed in Division Two compared to 397,589 who sat in the 2024 cohort.

Another 165,226 candidates were in Division Three, while 84,724 passed in Division Four.

While releasing the exams last Friday, the Minister of Education, Ms Janet Museveni, said the government is in the process of making major reforms in the primary school curriculum to align it with the revised Lower Secondary School Curriculum that emphasizes competence-based learning.

Earlier attempts (2006) to introduce a Competence-Based Curriculum (thematic curriculum) at the primary level fell flat, allegedly due to resistance from parents, teachers, and school owners who opposed the use of local languages as a medium of instruction at lower primary.

half of parents."

He adds that there is a need for an ordinance against child labour in the district.

Mr Yeko says the lack of political will to enact ordinances is one of the reasons why Kapchorwa and other districts in the Sebei Sub-region are usually among the poorly performing districts in the PLE.

In Ntoroko, persistent flooding in the district has once again exposed deep inequalities in access to quality education, after several flood-affected primary schools registered a poor performance with only five candidates passing in Division One.

The most affected schools include Masaka, Umoja, and Rwangara, which for years have been operating in makeshift tents after floods partially submerged classrooms.

Schools in Kanara and Butungama Sub-counties, which were among the worst-hit by floods earlier in the year, recorded mainly Division Two and Three results, a situation that education leaders attribute to prolonged displacement, poor learning environments, and repeated disruptions.

The Ntoroko District chairperson, Mr William Kasoro, says: "Our government's request has been to relocate these schools to other places so that our learners can learn in a good environment. The government promised to buy land for all flood-affected communities in Ntoroko, and what is remaining is to buy land from owners because the prime minister came here before the elections."

At Masaka Primary School, the head teacher, Mr Vincent Asiimwe, says none of the 28 candidates attained Division One.

"Out of the 28 candidates, 17 passed in Division Two, 10 in Division Three, and one candidate did not turn up for the exams," Mr Asiimwe says

He contrasted the performance with 2024, when the school managed to produce one first-grade pupil, despite similar challenges.

At Umoja Primary School, the head teacher, Mr Benson Ajuna, says flooding has crippled learning for years, with the school buildings partially submerged since 2019.

"Since schools reopened after Covid-19, our pupils have been studying in tents at the Rwenyena IDP camp. This learning environment is the main reason for our poor performance," Mr Ajuna says.

In 2025, the school registered 30 candidates, with 29 passing in Division Two and one in Division Three. In 2024, all 21 candidates passed in Division Two.

Karamoja gets 192 first grades

Karamoja Sub-region, one of the poorest regions in the countryside, only managed to get 192 first grades, with the majority of these best candidates coming from private schools in the districts of Moroto and Kotido.

Dr Ayub Mukisa, the executive director of Karamoja Anti-Corruption Coalition (KACC), says there is a little improvement in PLE performance in Karamoja, adding that if the government increases supervision, Karamoja has the potential to do better.

He says many parents and guardians in Karamoja Sub-region do not value education, forcing their children to do chores during school hours.

"If there is a way the boarding section can be compulsory for all learners in Karamoja, it can easily make an im-

pact," Mr Mukisa says.

Mr Francis Stephen Adome, a teacher in Kotido District, says the majority of the children in Karamoja do not get good elementary education, and this, in the later stage of primary education translates into poor results.

In the recently released PLE results, Abim District got 17 first grades, Amudat District got three, Kaabong got eight, Kotido (55), Moroto (69), Nabilatuk (13), Nakapiripirit (nine), and Napak (eight).

In Kaliro, the district education officer, Mr Edward Kamaga, confirms a decline in school performance in the district.

"This year, we recorded a drop in performance, with 124 candidates passing in Division One compared to 186 last year," he explains

He attributes the drop in performance to the strike by teachers as pupils were preparing to sit for their final exams.

Mr Rogers Kiduma, the assistant resident district commissioner of Kaliro, says some teachers abandoned their duties during this period and focussed on private businesses.

He also blames parents for the poor performance, saying: "Many children here spend only a few days at school before the final exams because they are sent to work on sugarcane farms."

He links the poor grades to the presence of water bodies in the Busoga districts, where children spend time fishing instead of focusing on learning.

Mr Moses Kyakulaga, the head teacher of Budabangula Primary School in Luuka Town Council, Luuka District, says the school had 138 candidates but got only two first grades.

In Mbarara City and district, officials say most of the schools that perform poorly are government-funded and are located in the rural areas.

Ms Kellen Ayebazibwe, the senior inspector of schools in Mbarara District, blames the poor performance on a shortage of funds, among others.

"Some of these schools are operating under poor conditions; they lack the necessary infrastructure, teachers are not enough, and they lack scholastic materials. I think the government needs to increase funding in Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools to make them competitive with private schools," Ms Ayebazibwe says.

The Diocesan Education Officer of Ankole Diocese, Rev Agasha Muhwezi, attributes the poor performance in government schools to dereliction of duty by parents.

"Most parents have neglected their responsibilities because they are deceived into believing that the government caters for everything under UPE. Most of our schools are performing better because parents have agreed to contribute to their children's education, we can recruit enough teachers, put in place the necessary infrastructure, and buy enough scholastic materials," Rev Agasha says.

He says government should increase the amount of money allocated to schools and parents should fulfil their duties of educating their children

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