

PLE results: Beyond gender comparisons to meaningful education reform for all

The release of the 2025 Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) results has once again sparked public debate, particularly around how the boy-child performed in comparison to the girl-child. While such comparisons are inevitable, they must be approached with caution, depth, and a clear understanding of what examination results truly represent.

According to the Uganda National Examinations Board (Uneb), more girls than boys sat for the PLE, reflecting improved enrolment and retention of the girl-child in primary education. However, a subject-by-subject analysis reveals notable patterns. Girls performed better in English Language, while boys showed stronger performance in Mathematics, Integrated Science, and Social Studies with Religious Education, especially at higher achievement levels.

These differences should not be interpreted as a measure of intelligence or capability between genders. Rather, they point to variations in learning experiences, teaching approaches, confidence levels, and social expectations. Language subjects often benefit from consistent practice, reading culture, and expressive engagement areas where many girls are encouraged early. On the other hand,

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boys may receive more reinforcement and confidence-building in analytical and problem-solving subjects.

As an educationist and consultant, I observe that these results highlight systemic issues within our education environment. Teaching methods still lean heavily toward examination performance instead of conceptual understanding. In addition, gender-responsive pedagogy remains limited, leaving some learners unsupported in subjects where they require encouragement rather than comparison.

Improving performance across subjects

requires deliberate action. Strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy in lower primary is critical. Teachers must be continuously supported with training that enables them to address diverse learning needs and build learner confidence, particularly in Mathematics and Science. Schools should also use assessment data to design targeted interventions instead of applying uniform solutions.

Parents, too, have an important role to play. Examination results should never be used to label a child's ability or predict their future success. PLE captures performance at a single point in time; it does not measure creativity, resilience, leadership, or problem-solving skills that are equally important in life. Children thrive best when parents focus on effort, growth, and emotional support rather than comparison and pressure.

Ultimately, the conversation should move beyond who performed better. The real question is how Uganda can create an education system that recognises diverse strengths, supports every learner, and prepares children not just to pass exams, but to succeed in life.

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