

Verify all civil servants, not just teachers

THE decision by the Education Service Commission (ESC) to verify teachers' academic and professional documents is timely. For a long time, the teaching profession has been infiltrated by impostors, who use forged academic documents to get onto the public payroll.

These affect the integrity of public service, steal taxpayer money, and endanger the future of our learners.

The ESC 2022 human resource validation exercise uncovered at least 617 cases of forged academic documents among staff in government secondary schools.

The Government is, therefore, right to demand that teachers present original academic documents and valid practicing licences. The threat of removal from payroll, prosecution, and recovery of fraudulently earned salaries is equally justified under the Penal Code Act Cap 128, which prescribes stiff penalties for forgery of official documents. But if this exercise ends with teachers alone, it will have missed the bigger picture. The problem is not confined to schools.

Evidence from the same report and insider accounts suggests that some chief administrative officers and



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Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC);

Company listed on the Uganda Securities

Exchange

www.newvision.co.ug

human resource officers at local governments have either negligently or deliberately facilitated the entry of unqualified individuals onto the payroll. Headteachers, too, are to blame for facilitating the fraud. This is where the real problem starts.

Punishing only the impostor teacher while ignoring the

enablers within the system would be a grave injustice and a missed opportunity for reform.

We must, therefore, go beyond a sector-specific crackdown. What is needed is a comprehensive, government-wide verification exercise across the entire civil service. Every public servant, whether in education, health, administration, or finance, should be required to present their academic credentials for verification.

Besides catching fraudsters, this will help to restore credibility in public institutions.

The Government also needs to close some gaps that have allowed this vice to continue. A local government official said when they contact universities to authenticate the teachers' academic papers, they are asked to pay some money which is not budgeted for. This can be addressed through establishing a centralised digital verification system accessible to all accounting officers.

Equally important is protection for whistleblowers. Headteachers and supervisors who identify forgeries should not have to worry about their job security.