PLE results expose gaps in education

Education experts have isolated four key factors they say are responsible for poor perfomance: Teacher strikes, child labour, poverty and parental neglect.

BY MONITOR TEAM

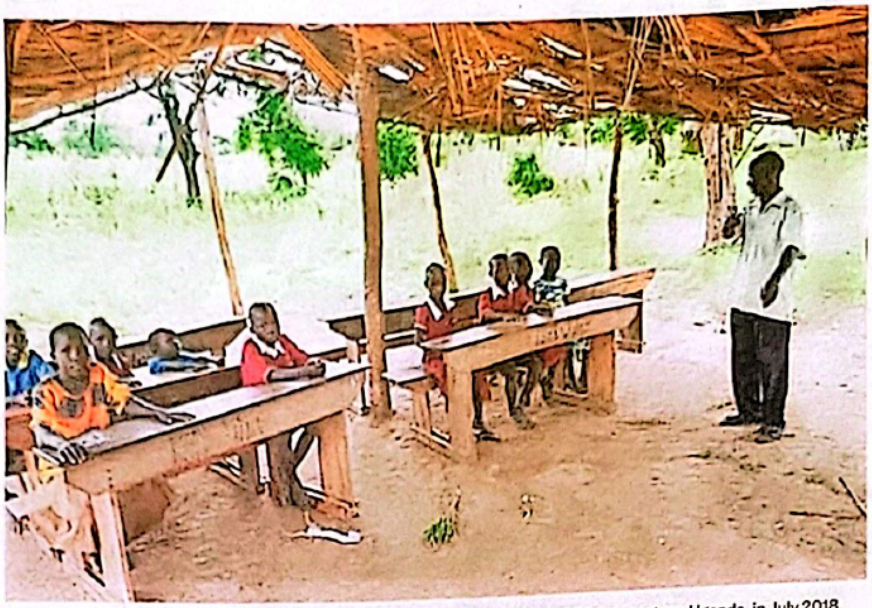
Several districts in eastern Uganda have once again registered weak performance in the 2025 Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE), with education officials attributing the trend to teacher strikes, child labour, poverty and parental neglect.

Districts in the Busoga Sub-region, as well as parts of eastern and Sebei sub-regions — including Kaliro, Buyende, Iganga, Mayuge and Bugiri — recorded fewer Division One candidates than last year, raising renewed concerns about academic standards, despite notable improvements in areas such as Kapchorwa Municipality.

In Busoga, PLE performance remained uneven, revealing a stark divide between high-performing and struggling schools. Starlight Primary School in Bukaye, Kamuli Municipality, stood out by producing one pupil with Aggregate 4, a rare achievement in the sub-region.

In contrast, Nairaka Primary School and Bugabula Primary School, both in Luuka District, have not registered a Division One candidate in the past decade.

The region also recorded a high number of withheld results, with pupils from Jinja, Buyende, Namutumba and Kaliro among the most affected in 2025.



Pupils study in a makeshift classroom at Wairagala Primary School in Budaka District, eastern Uganda, in July 2018. PHOTO/FILE

Declining performance in Kaliro

The Kaliro District Education Officer, Mr Edward Kamaga, confirmed a decline in performance.

"In this PLE, performance declined, with only 124 candidates attaining Division One compared to 186 last year," Mr Kamaga said.

He attributed the drop to a last-minute teachers' strike as candidates prepared for the examinations.

The Kaliro Assistant Resident District Commissioner, Mr Rogers Kiduma, said some teachers abandoned classes during the strike to focus on private businesses, including schools they had established.

Mr Kiduma also blamed poor performance in Busoga on sugarcane farming, noting that many children are withdrawn from school soon after PLE registration.

"Many parents send their children to cut sugarcane soon after Uneb registration, leaving them with little time to attend school and prepare for exams," he said.

He further linked the poor grades to the numerous water bodies in the sub-region, where some pupils opt for fishing instead of attending school.

Pupil transfers and teacher morale

Mr Muzamil Musembya, a retired headteacher in Jinja City, said the transfer of bright pupils from Busoga schools to Kampala before Primary Seven has negatively affected performance.

"Some parents move their best pupils to schools in Kampala after the lower classes, leaving Busoga schools with fewer top performers," Mr Musembya said.

He added that parents who retain their children in Busoga schools often fail to provide essential scholastic requirements, further affecting performance.

Mr Musembya also cited low teacher motivation, saying poverty prevents parents from topping up teachers' salaries, as is done in other regions.

"In some schools, parents top up teachers' salaries, but in Busoga, poverty often prevents this, leaving teachers demoralised," he said.

Bugiri and Mayuge mixed outcomes

In Bugiri District, the Assistant District Education Officer, Mr Robert Mutumba, said performance declined compared to the 2024 PLE results.

He attributed the poor results to domestic violence in some homes.

"Domestic violence affects pupils' concentration and emotional stability, which directly impacts academic performance," Mr Mutumba said.

However, Mayuge District registered improved results. The district schools inspector, Mr Nathan Wabwire, said the 2025 performance was better than in 2024, with no school results cancelled.

"Increased parental support contributed to the improvement," Mr Wabwire said.

He, nevertheless, pointed to persistent challenges, including high dropout rates among girls and inadequate examination centres in island areas.

Katakwi records drop in Division One passes

Katakwi District also recorded a decline in Division One passes, registering 128 pupils compared to 151 in 2024.

Out of 2,970 candidates, a total of 128 passed in Division One, 1,325 in Division Two, 727 in Division Three, 391 in Division Four, while 369 failed.

The District Inspector of Schools, Mr John Bosco Okiror, blamed the decline on the teachers' strike.

"Most pupils were left to manage on their own during the teachers' strike," Mr Okiror said.

He said the district would review its strategies ahead of the 2026 examinations.



Aisha Nabirye of Kamuli Girls Boarding School with her mother (right) and Buyende LC5 chairperson-elect Sharif Mangaraine, who sponsored her education from Primary One. She got Aggregate 13. PHOTO/SAM C. OPIO

WHAT THEY SAID...

Poverty. "In some schools, parents top up teachers' salaries, but in Busoga, poverty often prevents this, leaving teachers demoralised," **Mr Muzamil Musembya, a retired headteacher in Jinja City.**

Staff gap. "Low pupil-to-teacher ratios are key for effective learning. In most schools we visited [in Sebei], the ratio was 1:83, compared to the national average of about 1:43," **Robert Cheptoek, KACSOA Executive Director.**

Apuuton Primary School led with 42 Division One pupils, followed by Katakwi Primary with 25. Other schools with Division One candidates included Angodingod (15), Akisim-Toroma (eight), Jib Junior and Omodoi (five each), Katakwi Township (five), Amusai (three), Opeta Lake (three) and Getom (two).

Kapchorwa shines with record results

Kapchorwa Municipality in the Sebei sub-region registered a historic milestone after a pupil scored an aggregate of four in the 2025 PLE.

Maximilla Chemusto of Faith Homes Primary School topped the municipality among 2,099 candidates across 24 centres.

For the first time since its creation in 2016, Kapchorwa Municipality recorded 216 Division One and 936 Division Two passes.

"This is the first time the municipality has achieved such a feat," said the Principal Education Officer, Mr Dan Siwa Aloucious.

"The pupils' performance has brought pride to the community and highlights the potential of Kapchorwa and the Sebei region," he added.

He attributed the success to parental involvement, consistent monitoring and improved learning conditions.

"We strengthened inspections and monitoring, and unlike last year when the best score was five, we registered several four-point aggregates," he said.

In Kapchorwa District, 20 pupils passed in Division One, 413 in Division Two and 387 in Division Three out of 1,383 candidates.

The district's Principal Education Officer, Mr Fred Chelimo, said the performance marked a significant improvement after the district ranked last nationally in 2024.

"The overall performance was fair. We beat 14 districts and registered seven Division One pupils," Mr Chelimo said.

Persistent challenges

Mr Robert Cheptoek, the Executive Director of the Kapchorwa Civil Society Organisations Alliance (KACSOA), said private schools played a major role in boosting performance compared to government schools.

"Government schools need to give learners more assignments and tests to familiarise them with the examination format," he said.

He also called for improved teacher remuneration and the implementation of school feeding programmes.

Daily Monitor established that pupils in hilly Kapchorwa continue to face challenges such as teacher absenteeism, limited classrooms and inadequate learning materials.

The 2024 Kapchorwa District Report Card by Uwezo and KACSOA revealed that only 25 percent of Primary Three to Seven pupils were competent in English and Mathematics.

The findings were based on a June-August 2025 assessment of 668 children from 300 households. Mr Cheptoek said the teacher-to-pupil ratio of 1:83 in Kapchorwa schools is a major concern.

"Low pupil-to-teacher ratios are key for effective learning. In most schools we visited, the ratio was 1:83, compared to the national average of about 1:43," he said.

Regional and national outlook

Teachers across the region blamed low literacy levels on child labour, cultural activities and parental neglect.

"Parents oppose school feeding programmes, so children attend lessons hungry or are kept at home to work during harvests," a teacher, who preferred anonymity, told *Daily Monitor*.

Mr John Yeko, a retired head teacher, urged the government to allow parents to provide meals in government schools.

"If parents are not allowed to feed learners, the government should do so," he said, calling for ordinances to curb child labour.

According to Uneb, 91,900 candidates passed in Division One in 2025, up from 84,301 in 2024. Division Two passes dropped from 397,589 to 388,293; Division Three slightly declined from 165,284 to 165,226, while Division Four increased from 75,556 to 84,724. Failures rose from 64,251 to 77,080.

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