"This prog... rectly to the impacts of climate change... ...piemented in partnership with Ger... Mr Ochuna said the project is de... ...cal solutions tailored to their requir...

Over 1,200 candidates fail PLE in Oyam

Out of 5,702 candidates who sat the examinations, only 171 passed in Division One, an alarming outcome that underscores deep-rooted systemic challenges.

BY BILL OKETCH



Stakeholders at a meeting to evaluate the returns on investment in education at Oyam District headquarters on December 3, 2025. PHOTO/BILL OKETCH

Oyam District in northern Uganda is grappling with a severe education crisis, as reflected in the 2025 Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) results, which place the district among the country's worst performers.

Out of 5,702 candidates who sat the examinations, only 171 passed in Division One, an alarming outcome that underscores deep-rooted systemic challenges.

Analysis of the results paints a troubling picture: 90 schools failed to produce a single Division One candidate, while 1,282 pupils either failed outright or got Division Ungraded (U). Even more concerning, 96 candidates did not turn up for the examinations, a trend that raises serious questions about learner retention and engagement.

At Minakulu Primary School in Minakulu Sub-county, Oyam County South, 114 candidates were registered, yet none passed in Division One. Twenty-three candidates failed, five were absent, while 33 passed in Division Two. A further 36 and 17 candidates passed in Divisions Three and Four, respectively.

A similar trend was recorded at Agobadong Primary School, where 25 out of 30 candidates who sat the 2025 PLE failed. Only two passed in Division Two, while three managed Division Three.

At Agwet Primary School, 19 candidates registered, but 13 failed, and one was absent. Of the 18 pupils who sat, 12 boys and seven girls, one passed in Division Two, three in Division Three, and one in Division Four.

Ayomapwono Primary School recorded 18 failures out of 61 candidates. In contrast, at Kuluopuk Primary School, 11 out of 17 candidates were ungraded. Two candidates passed in Division Two, three in Division Three, and one in Division Four.

Abang Primary School also posted poor results, with 15 of the 25 candidates who sat the exams failing. Six passed in Division Two, eight in Division Three, and six in Division Four.

For the sixth consecutive year, Lelaolok Primary School failed to produce a Division One candidate. In 2025, five out of 18 candidates failed the examinations.

At Ocini Primary School, 11 of the 33 candidates failed. Meanwhile, at Nora Primary School, 22 out of 59 registered candidates were ungraded, with only one candidate attaining Division One.

Amati Primary School registered 105 candidates but did not produce any Division One passes. Fourteen candidates failed, while 41 passed in Division Two, 34 in Division Three, and 16 in Division Four.

However, the district's performance was not uniformly bleak. A total of 1,793 candidates from 121 schools passed in Division Two, indicating pockets of progress and potential for improvement.

For instance, Meta Primary School, a private institution, posted exceptional results, with 48 candidates passing in Division One and two in Division Two out of 50 candidates.

Atapara West Primary School also registered some success, producing four Division One candidates. Out of 107 registered pupils, three were absent; 65 passed in Division Two, 23 in Division Three, and nine in Division Four.

Education experts cite several contributing factors, including acute teacher shortages, chronic teacher and pupil absenteeism, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate learning resources. These challenges have significantly undermined efforts to equip learners with basic literacy and numeracy skills.

The situation, stakeholders stress, is not necessarily a reflection of teacher incompetence, but rather the result of a complex interplay of systemic issues.

Nearly all of the 109 Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools in Oyam are struggling with poor teacher-to-pupil ratios, which negatively affect learning outcomes. Even where teachers are present, they often work under difficult conditions characterised by overcrowding, limited instructional materials, and insufficient opportunities for professional development.

These findings were highlighted in a school-based baseline assessment conducted between March and April 2025 by the Foundation for Inclusive Community Help (FICH) in partnership with Uwezo Uganda. The assessment covered 25 schools and revealed widespread shortages of basic infrastructure such as well-constructed classrooms and desks.

Mr Anthony Nam, head teacher of Aloni Primary School in Iceme Sub-county, Oyam County North, said inadequate teacher capacity building and overwhelming class sizes have worsened the situation.

"At my school, we have 287 Primary Three pupils squeezed into one classroom, and 413 Primary Four pupils learning in a church building," Mr Nam said.

He added that domestic violence is also affecting learners' performance.

"I currently have three children staying in my home due to domestic violence. Two of them are in Primary Seven," he said.

Mr Patrick Okada Opito, principal of Loro Core Primary Teachers' College, observed that the problem partly stems from the teaching culture in schools.

"When these teachers come to us, we train them very well. They leave when they are still motivated, but once they reach their work stations, they are influenced by the laziness of some teachers already in the system," Mr Okada said.

He further described a category of teachers he termed "absent from within", teachers who are physically present at school but do not teach.

"They don't go to class, or they go simply to occupy space because the head teacher expects them to be there. Others pretend to prepare lessons but are actually doing their own things," he explained, adding that strong supervision by head teachers is critical.

The Oyam District Speaker, Mr Norman Otyeno, said the district is experiencing a phenomenon of "schooling without learning," driven by inadequate infrastructure, limited funding, insufficient manpower, and persistent absenteeism among both teachers and learners.

"Our classes are overcrowded, learners are not learning, and children begin to feel that going to school is a waste of time. They are in school for years, but have they really learnt anything?" he asked.

Mr Otyeno also faulted low parental involvement, noting that many parents misunderstood the UPE policy when it was introduced in 1996.

"People thought 'free education' meant everything would be provided by government, including uniforms, and books. That misunderstanding persists to this day," he said.

The Oyam District Education Officer, Mr David Adea, emphasised that reversing the trend will require collective action from all stakeholders.

Addressing these challenges, he said, demands honest reflection, stronger supervision, increased investment, and renewed commitment from government, schools, parents, and the wider community if Oyam District is to achieve meaningful and lasting change in its education system.

UPE SCHOOLS

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