OBOTE RETURNS TO SCHOOL AFTER 25 YEARS

By Emmy Alomu

PHOTO BY EMMY ALOMU



Obote with his classmates attending a school assembly. He joined Senior Five after sitting Senior Four in 2001 and wants to become a medical doctor

At the age of 43, Bosco Obote, a resident of Ogweng village in Alito sub-county in Kapelebyong district, has decided to return to school after 25 years to achieve his dream of becoming a medical doctor.

Unlike many of his agemates in the village, who are barely literate, Obote attained an above-basic level of education before he dropped out in 2001. He sat the Uganda Certificate of Education exams at Obote College in Lira and obtained an aggregate of 32 in eight subjects, but was unable to continue due to may befactors beyond his control.

"I lost my parents and amidst financial difficulties, I dropped out of school and started tilling the land for a living," he says.

The father of six has joined the 116 Senior Five students of Labira Girls Secondary School in Obalanga town council, Kapelebyong district.

He is not taking things lightly. He is pursuing a combination of Biology, Chemistry and Agriculture.

"My goal is to get 20 points in the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) exams in 2027 so that I can become a doctor. I am currently a day scholar, but I plan to transition to boarding school. I will ensure that my wife takes care of my farms so that I concentrate on education," Obote says.

Despite years of absence from the classroom and disruptions caused by family needs, Obote is performing well. At the end of the first term, he was one of the 100 top-performing students at the school.

However, balancing education and farm work has not been easy for Obote.

He has been running a tight daily schedule to maintain his performance.

Each day, Obote wakes up at 5:00am and goes to dig in the garden, usually ploughing with oxen, until around 7:00am and then returns home to prepare for school. The school is about 5km away from home.

"I ride a bicycle and arrive there in less than an hour. Before fuel prices shot up, I would ride my motorcycle when I was running late," he recalls.

In class, he prefers to sit in the front row to understand what the teacher teaches.

"If I find the front row occupied, I take the second one," Obote says.

Despite the age difference, Obote has been able to freely interact with his younger classmates.

"I treat my fellow students like siblings, my children. Some of them consider me a father figure," he shares.

Reflecting on his journey back to school, Obote says: "What inspired me to return to school is witnessing the direction of education in Uganda, combined with my wife's support. In the past, completing Senior Four was considered a big achievement. Right now, things have changed. People have attained bigger qualifications. With the encouragement of my wife, I will seek more knowledge," he says.

Like any typical student, Obote engages in various co-curricular activities, including football, music, dance and drama. On April 30, 2026, during a welcome party for Senior One and Five students, he thrilled the audience, including students, parents and district leaders, with his guitar rendition of the classic song *Sina Makosa*."

Obote says his musical talents date back as far as primary school.

"I am a good xylophonist. In 1995, I received a certificate as the best instrumental soloist at the National Theatre in Kampala. My passion for music made me learn how to play a guitar. I now play it and teach other students," he says.

FAMILY

Despite facing challenges in providing for his family and sourcing learning materials, Obote is determined to adapt to the new curriculum, having studied under the old one.

As a day scholar, he pays school fees of sh348,000 per term. He encourages his peers, reminding them that education has no endpoint.

"The benefits are sweet, even if the journey is tough," he advises.

About his family, Obote says: "Most of my children are in primary school, while two are toddlers, who are still with their mother. Since dropping out of school 25 years ago, I have been growing rice and maize to sustain my family."

Born on June 24, 1982, Obote is married to Sarah Amule. About three years ago, he was elected chief of the Otengor-bakolang clan in Otuke district.



WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY

Emmanuel Okedi, 26, considers Obote his best friend and mentor, appreciating his wisdom and experience navigating various life challenges, especially being a family man.

Okedi admires the manner in which Obote can persevere in the face of adversity.

"I want to adopt the qualities he possesses for my growth," Okedi states.

Stephen Opio, a Senior Five Biology teacher, praises Obote as a well-behaved and proactive student.

In the first term, Obote achieved a B in Biology, a C in Chemistry and a C in Agriculture, earning a total of 13 points.

Opio believes Obote shows great promise, noting that he is attentive in class and has a proactive approach to seeking help from teachers whenever needed.

"I regard him almost like a father figure and I support him wholeheartedly," Opio adds.



Obote plays a guitar as his teacher (left) and headteacher, Aggrey Othieno, hold the microphone

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