

AN EXPERT SAID 'TEACHERS' COMPETENCES RECEDE AS ONE MOVES FARTHER FROM THE CENTRAL REGION

By Betty Amamukirori

# UNEB report shows regional imbalance in early grade learning

A survey report released by the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) on early grade reading has revealed glaring regional imbalances in the performances of early grade learners in English and the local languages.

The survey study which was done by UNEB through its annual National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) programme, revealed that early grade learners from Lango, Karamoja, Busoga, Bunyoro, Acholi and Toro regions, have problems identifying letters in both English and their respective local languages.

Their counterparts from Kamwenge, Kibaale, Kyankwani, Teso, Mubende, Bundibugyo, Bududa and Bulambuli districts, scored fairly well in identifying letters in both their local dialects and the English language.

However, pupils from West Nile, specifically Maracha district, scored highly in letter identification in their local language with 77.5% of P2 pupils being able to identify at least four of the five letters showed to them but scored poorly (15.6%) in English.

Busoga is one of the worst performing regions in both English and the local dialect P2 with pupils scoring 15.2% in letter identification in Lusoga and 41.4% in the English language.

Pupils who speak Lhukonzo, Lumasaba, Luganda, Runyankore-Rukiga and Ateso scored higher in English than in their local dialects, while those from Karamoja had a uniform score in both languages.

The baseline survey was conducted in 11 districts where the performance of pupils in Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) was poor. It was conducted in 405 government-aided primary schools. A total of 15,695 pupils in P1, P2 and P3 were sampled.

The languages are Ateso, Leb-Acoli, Leb-Lango, Lhukonzo, Luganda, Lugbarat, Lumasaba, Lusoga, Ngakarimojong, Runyankore-Rukiga and Runyoro-Rutoro. The survey was



Buganda Road Primary School pupils after a head-count last year

George William Ssemivule, a lecturer at Ndejje University, called on Government to reform the nature of teacher recruitment in primary schools to include degree and diplomas instead of O'level leavers with certificates in primary teaching. "Government should be courageous enough to start offering diplomas and degrees for primary teachers. At this level, the teachers tend to be competent and eloquent. He said the Government should fast-track the early childhood education policy and put it into practice, stating that learning involves several important aspects that have gone unnoticed. He also urged the society to get involved and make sure that children are enrolled for early childhood education so that they are able to go through the first stage of learning.

**WAY FORWARD**

carried out in October 2016.

While in Seeta, Mukono district recently launching the report at Ridar Hotel, Dan Odongo, UNEB's executive secretary noted that the early grade reading approach was adopted to expose children to the basic skills of reading, which is the foundation for eventual reading comprehension.

"Improving learners' reading skills is a key element in the learning process and in enhancing the quality of learning taking place in our schools," he said.

Speaking to *New Vision*, Tony Mukasa Lusambu, the Assistant Commissioner for pre-primary and primary education at the Ministry of Education and Sports explained that the results are an indication of the quality of education a pupil receives both at school and at home.

"The quality of education these pupils receive is affected by a number of factors such as the quality of teachers and the reading materials available for use by the pupils," he said.

Lusambu noted that pupils in the region that perform well have a lot of reading materials at their disposal while those in the poorly performing regions do not.

He said the quality of education is also affected by the lack of feeding and the literacy of the parents, explaining that children with literate parents tend to perform better in reading than those with illiterate ones.

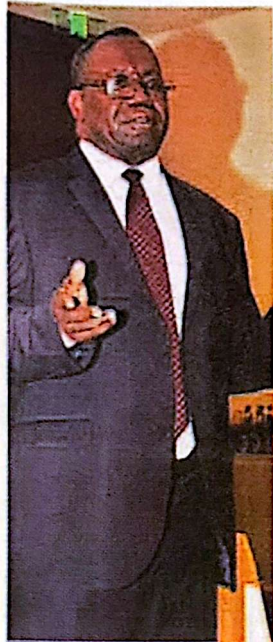
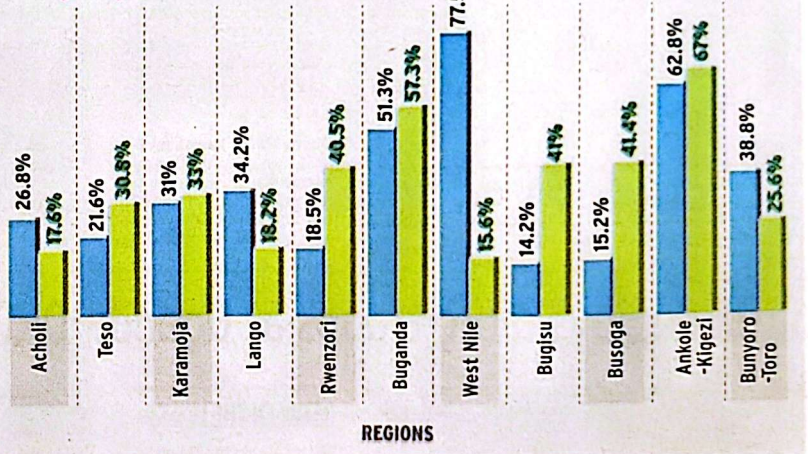
"There are a number of factors causing these discrepancies that we need to look at closely to be able to address the issues," he said.

George William Ssemivule, a lecturer at Ndejje University, attributed

the disparity in performance to the teachers' competencies which he said recede as the districts move farther from the central region.

He said that the parents' attitude is also to be blamed because most of them tend not to enroll their children in nursery schools for an early introduction to the formal learning process, and that sometimes most rural districts do not have nursery schools.

## Letter identification in local and English language



UNEB's Dan Odongo says early grade reading approach was adopted to expose children to the basic skills of reading

*"The quality of education is affected by the quality of teachers."* Mukasa Lusambu

"The farther the districts get from the central region, the longer distances travelled by pupils to reach schools and parents would rather keep their children at home until they are strong enough other than risking them walk such long distances," he said.

He noted that it is still a big challenge to get teachers in the Primary Teachers Colleges who can teach and write fluently in their local languages.