

Report reveals 70% of primary school learners struggle with writing

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At least 70 percent of learners in primary schools in Uganda cannot write adequately, a new report by Uwezo Uganda and the People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network indicates. The report, titled Development of the Assessment of Children's Writing Skills in Uganda, assessed writing competencies among 200 children aged between eight and 12 years. The sample was drawn from one district in eastern Uganda, representing both an urban city and a rural district. All primary grades from Primary One (P1) to Primary Six (P6) were well represented in the sample. Household visits were conducted in July, script scoring was completed in September, and data analysis and reporting took place between October and December. The assessment aimed to develop culturally appropriate procedures for

evaluating children's writing skills, recognize both creative and technical aspects of writing, and provide evidence on the validity, reliability, and feasibility of the assessment tools.

According to the report, children were assessed and placed into one of four writing levels based on their competencies: non-writers or writers of letters only, writers of words, writers of isolated sentences, and writers of continuous text.

Findings show that out of the 200 children assessed, 70 were classified as non-writers or writers of letters only, 45 as writers of words, 51 as writers of sentences, and only 34 as writers of text. This means that more than two-thirds of the learners could not write beyond basic words or sentences.

"The data provide initial evidence on the levels and quality of children's writing, how writing levels relate to reading ability, the extent to which

curriculum objectives are being met, and the individual and social factors influencing writing achievement," the report states.

A qualitative review of writing samples revealed that some children were able to express emotions effectively, use relevant vocabulary, and apply past tense correctly. However, only a few demonstrated continuity, coherence, and structured narratives.

The report further shows a strong relationship between reading and writing skills. Children who could read and comprehend a story were more likely to write at the sentence level or higher.

Analysis of writing levels by grade revealed a particularly challenging situation in the lower primary classes. Fewer than one-third of learners in P1 to P3 could write at sentence level or above, compared to more than 70 percent of learners in P4 to P6. Researchers attribute this gap largely

to the impact of prolonged school closures, which disproportionately affected lower primary learners. Even in upper primary (P5-P6), however, only a small proportion of learners reached the text-writing level, indicating that curriculum objectives for English writing are not being met for most children.

The assessment also examined individual attributes and social factors influencing writing performance.

Findings indicate that children reported to have memory difficulties were more likely to perform at lower writing levels. Additionally, the report found that grade level had a much stronger influence on writing achievement than age, underscoring the critical role schools play in developing children's writing skills.

The findings highlight an urgent need for targeted interventions to strengthen foundational literacy skills, particularly in lower primary classes.

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