



JOHNSON OKWERA > POLICY

Is poor examination performance an evidence of a stale education system?

At Pandwong Primary School in Kitgum District, one of the best performing schools in the area for the last two decades, lies a rather high quarter of a declining Primary Leaving Education (PLE) performance just like all the rest of the schools in the region.

The mood is somber for all parents and teachers, who for many years, have been gathering to celebrate the good performance whenever such releases were made. The release of the 2017 PLE results on January 12 was not their lucky day so was 2016 subtly.

The radio stations in the district already held a series of discussion panels to brainstorm on what went wrong or is not being done in the district as compared to other sister districts and regions to improve performance.

On February 6, 2017, I wrote an article in *The Daily Monitor* after the release of both PLE and UCE examination results about the teaching profession's future and articulated on a couple of things to take care of for the noble profession and public education in this country in general.

The script has not changed since then. In the piece, I mentioned that "Out of growing

concerns of the contemporary 'flat world' of global economic competition, it demands that, we have a more highly educated, better prepared, and professionally well-nurtured and motivated teacher workforce at all levels'.

In my closing, I emphasised that, unless decision makers set a place at the policy table for teachers, who are working every day in our nation's most challenging schools, I highly suspect that many of the issues facing the teaching profession and education in the country generally, may not yet be overcome in the short run.

Also, Uganda's teachers would lack the skills, resources, and support needed to serve all learners effectively and we will continue to look for solutions to the achievement gap and other problems that plague our public schools "in all the wrong places" and history will continue to repeat itself. This has suspicion has come to pass with the release of the first national examination results- PLE.

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Excuses. Every time examination results releases are made, those in charge of policy making and tasked with the responsibility to manage the education system feed us with a plethora of excuses and lamentations with no real game-changing suggestions.

durate performances. This kind of sustained confusion contributes to the belief that the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) has done more damage to education than adding a pillar to the learners.

Politics has started to eat up our communication, where serious matters are communicated in ways studded with so much unseriousness and sometimes non-serious matters are communicated with a stick in the hands.

For education governing boards and bodies such as the National Curriculum Development Centre, Education Standard Agency, Uneb, MoES, Public Service, district level education manager's among others, each one claims the other has responsibility for whatever decision or action that needs to be taken to improve

the situation. Avoiding responsibility has become an art form in the plush corridors of the education set up in the country. Instead, promises are made somebody will do something, sometime in the future. Last year, of the 640,833 candidates, who registered for the PLE examinations, 488,310 candidates were from UPE while only 152, 657 were from non-UPE and the minority performed four times better than the majority mentioned. Who is fooling who here?

It would be so difficult to design a system more likely to deal with the needs of the current changing trends. But it has been easy to create power centres for politicians to cast the stones on and beat up teachers, arrest, name and shame school heads, teachers and parents for lack of good performances (soon the guns will turn to the learners').

Add to that there are intense levels of politicking and an almost complete lack of ethical integrity and an assertion of a human value to accept what has gone wrong and take the bitter pill. It is little wonder that thousands of learners, who underwent the UPE programme, are so halfbaked for the current job market (even with first class degrees), leave alone lacking any ingenuity to use education as a tool to survive in the 21st century.

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