

# Why SST was worst done subject

According to experts, SST was the worst-done subject because Uneb changed the way in which it set the questions.

BY PHILIP WAFULA

The Uganda National Examinations Board (Uneb) yesterday released last year's Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) results, showing a significant improvement in English and great decline in Social Studies and Religious Education (SST).

The examination was held on November 3 and 4, 2025, under the theme "Embracing security and holistic assessment of learners in a dynamic environment", the same theme used in 2024.

The Uneb Executive Director, Mr Dan Odongo, said issues that informed the development and use of the theme in 2024 were still relevant to the examination process in 2025, and relevant in driving the Board's agenda.

"Overall, at Grade 8 and above, candidates performed best in English, followed by Integrated Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies with Religious Education (SST)," Mr Odongo said at State Lodge, Nakasero in Kampala.

This year's overall performance of candidates in the four subjects is in contrast with the previous year, where Integrated Science was the best-performed subject, followed by Social Studies with Religious Education (SST), Mathematics, and English.

To put the performance into context, in 2025, 10.1 percent of the 807,432 candidates (81,550) scored a Distinction Two in English compared to 4.9 percent of 787,049 candidates (38,565) who sat in 2024; while just 3.3 percent of the 807,460 candidates (26,646) obtained distinction two in SST last year compared to 7.7 percent of the 787,063 (60,603) candidates who obtained a similar grade the previous year.

The 2025 PLE results also show a significant increase in candidature and pass rate compared to the previous year, according to Mr Odongo.

"Overall, more candidates passed in Division One last year compared to 2024, an increase of 7,689; while in terms of numbers, more candidates (7,503) passed PLE last year compared to the previous year," he said.

He added: "Last year's examination registered a total of 817,883 candidates compared to 797,444 in 2024, an increase in candidature by 20,439 (2.6 percent), 389,469 (47.6 percent) boys being registered compared to 428,324 (52.4 percent) girls, indicating that more girls than boys completed the primary education cycle."

According to Mr Odongo, during the previous year, the candidature was 52.5 percent for girls and 47.5 percent for boys.

However, in terms of percentages, last year, males performed better than the females and recorded a lower failure rate.

"Girls performed better in English, while in Integrated Science, boys per-



The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Janet Museveni, releases the 2025 PLE results at State Lodge Nakasero in Kampala yesterday. PHOTO PPU

formed slightly better than girls.

"In Social Studies with Religious Education, boys performed slightly better than the girls, while in Mathematics, boys performed better than girls up to Credit 4, with fewer boys being in the lower grades (7 and 8, and Fail Grade 9)," he added.

Prof Celestino Obua, the Uneb chairperson, said candidature has continued to rise, while absenteeism has held steady at 1.3 percent in the last two years, adding that "any drop-out is a cause for concern".

"Performance at the Grade One pass level has improved over the 2024 examination. Overall, more candidates have qualified to proceed to join the next level/cycle of education than in 2024," said Prof Obua.

He further explained that with efforts put in by the government towards expansion of access to post-primary education, all 730,000 learners graded/passed will find places in secondary and vocational schools.

According to Prof Obua, for the last two years, the Board has identified two Local Governments with the lowest levels of achievement as seen from these results, and offered some capacity building support to selected teachers. He, however, didn't name the recipient, Local Governments.

"With the availability of funds, this intervention, small as it appears, will be maintained as a contribution to what other interventions the ministry will make through its other agencies," said Prof Obua.

According to a 2016 Uwezo Learning Outcome report, learning outcomes nationally in the country were low, with only three out of 10 pupils between Primary Three and Seven being able to read a Primary Two English story and carry out long division.

Mr Odongo, however, said Namutumba, Buyende, and Kaliro, among other districts in Eastern Uganda, registered the most cases of withheld results.

The Buyende District Education Officer (DEO), Mr Disson Bwire, said they were still summarising the results and had so far got two schools whose re-

sults had been withheld. "Uneb is releasing a few while withholding others; we are still summarising the results and have not yet finished," he said.

The Namutumba District Education Officer (DEO), Dr Muhammed Isiko, said he can only comment on the results after he has looked at them.

"I am currently in the field and can only comment after returning and looking at the results," he said.

## Why SST was worst done subject

According to Mr Bwire, SST was the worst-done subject because Uneb changed the way in which it was setting the questions.

"Uneb now wants candidates to analyse issues and give personal views; those direct questions of cramming are no longer being used," Mr Bwire said, adding that critical thinking is now critical in SST, unlike English and Mathematics, where the answer is right or

wrong.

Mr Bwire said because SST has become a "big problem", they are going to train teachers and give them senior examiners to re-tool them in order to change that trend.

Mr James Kisira, a teacher of SST at Kamuli Boys Primary School in Kamuli District, said SST was poorly done because the curriculum became competence-based.

"Instead of asking the children 'what', they were asked to explain 'how', meaning, they were being asked to reason," Mr Kisira said, adding that the children found reasoning challenging.

Mr Kisira also decried the alleged selective training of the new curriculum, saying only teachers in the urban areas of Kampala and Mukono were trained, while there was reportedly no capacity building on how to teach the new curriculum upcountry.

Mr Herbert Ntende, a teacher of Eng-

lish at Kiige Primary School, also in Kamuli District, said the subject recorded a significant improvement in performance because it earlier faced spelling challenges due to mother tongue (Lusoga-English) interference.

He, however, said they worked on tenses, made corrections that worked on the mother tongue interference and perfected the tenses, while at the same time, giving the candidates Newspapers in Education (a weekly pullout in *Daily Monitor*), and storybooks, which improved their spelling of words.

## BACKGROUND

Between 2013 and 2018, the districts of Namutumba, Iganga, Kaliro, Mayuge, Luuka, Bugiri, Kamuli, and Buyende were perennially listed among the worst-performing districts in the country.

A report released by Uneb in 2018 attributed the poor performance in Busoga Sub-region to the high rate of teacher and pupil absenteeism, lack of meals at schools, and the pupils' inability to read and understand examination questions.

The findings were linked to the fact that parents in the region had lost interest and decided to become spectators in the education of their children.

Officials at the time noted that most parents in rural areas believed that since Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced, it was the duty of the government to educate their children.

It was also noted that parents who supported their children to register for national exams never pushed them to attend class. Instead, they remained home to work and later appeared to sit for the exams.



**Reason.** Uneb now wants candidates to analyse issues and give personal views; those direct questions of cramming are no longer being used," - Mr Disson Bwire, Buyende District Education Officer