

WHY STREAMING LEARNERS BASING ON PERFORMANCE IS NOT GOOD

By **Violah Niwaha**

In 2022, Annet Kusasira enrolled his child in Senior One at one of the top schools in Wakiso district. At the end of the term, however, she was disappointed. Her son had been put in the stream of weak performers because he was the 87th in a class of 120 learners.

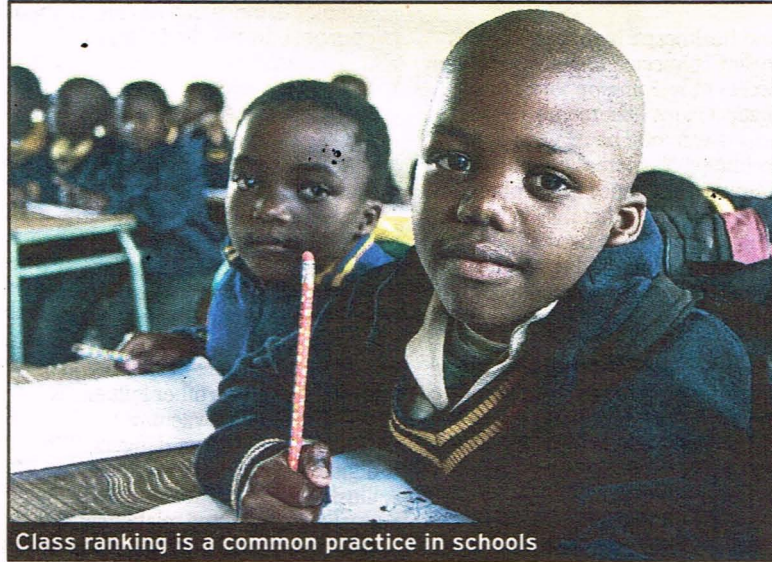
“He told me that they had three streams. B, which stands for ‘Best’, followed by G for ‘Good’ and W for the ‘Worst’. He told me that at the end of the term, the names of the best and worst performing learners in each class are read out during the assembly,” Kusasira says.

After listening to her son, she decided not to take him back to the school.

“How can trained teachers do such a thing to children? Putting learners in one stream and labelling it stupid is not professional at all. It kills a child’s confidence. There are better ways of encouraging learners to work hard without killing their confidence,” Kusasira says.

DRAWBACKS

Class ranking, in which learners are positioned according to their performance, is a common practice in many schools. While it can motivate high-achieving students and help



Class ranking is a common practice in schools

others set academic goals, it has drawbacks.

Learners at the bottom may feel stressed, discouraged or less capable. Some may be labelled as ‘slow’ by teachers or peers. Even average students can feel insecure if they fail to improve, while competition may sometimes overshadow teamwork.

Experts caution that ranking should be used carefully to avoid harming learners’ confidence and motivation. Jonathan Alanyu, a parent and

teacher, agrees with Kusasira.

“I cannot take my child to a school that labels some children as failures and others as bright. This can easily kill a learner’s motivation,” he says.

Alanyu instead supports mixed-ability classrooms, saying they reflect the reality of how children learn and grow.

“When learners of different abilities are in the same class, they support each other. Peer learning becomes very powerful because a child can

sometimes understand better from a fellow learner than from a teacher,” he explains.

Alanyu also believes in practical classroom strategies such as rotational seating.

“Changing where learners sit helps them interact with different classmates and prevents the creation of fixed groups of ‘strong’ and ‘weak’. It builds confidence and encourages participation from everyone,” he says.

Elite Nimusiima, a teacher in Wakiso district, says schools are moving away from streaming learners and ranking them according to positions. She says they are instead opting for aggregates.

Nimusiima also says seating arrangements can motivate learners, especially when weaker learners are placed near focused classmates. However, she cautions that positioning can also have drawbacks.

“Some learners may feel intimidated, lose confidence or begin to see themselves as ‘slow’ if seating highlights differences. Others may become overdependent on peers or frustrated if they feel unfairly treated,” she explains.

Eva Sanyu, a school director in Wakiso, says parents should take note of how their children perform and organise schedules to address their individual needs rather than

EXPERT ADVICE

Wilber Ssebuyungo, a lecturer of education at Nkumba University, says while mixing learners of different abilities aims at promoting inclusion, some teachers struggle to balance the needs of both fast and slow learners within a lesson.

“Limited time, overcrowded classrooms, limited resources and pressure to complete the syllabus often make it difficult for teachers to give equal attention to every student,” he says.

Ssebuyungo adds that teachers need to focus on three key concepts that guide teaching and learning

“They must ensure equity, where learners receive the most appropriate specialised needs depending on each individual; equality, ensuring that all learners have access to resources regardless of the gender, ability or even background and education quality, where learners get the right knowledge and skills,” he says.

leaving it primarily for teachers.

She adds that while mixed-ability classrooms encourage inclusion and peer learning, they also require careful planning, individual attention, parental involvement and extra effort.

“Without enough resources, some learners risk being left behind,” Sanyu adds.