

## Causes and Remedies for Low Academic Performance of Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools



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**ABSTRACT:** The main objective of the study was to understand the academic performance of learners at Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools. Specifically, the study explored the causes of the unsatisfactory performance and suggested solutions to uplift the performance standard in Bombo community UPE schools. The study is qualitative and uses a phenomenology design. The study population comprised five UPE schools, five head teachers, five directors of studies, 15 teachers, 10 students, five parents, and four local authorities. They were all purposively selected. Data collection was through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Thematic analysis method used to analyze data. To ensure rigor, Purposive sampling, triangulation of methods and respondents, member checking, and thick description were used to ensure rigor. The findings under school factors are; understaffing, lack of infrastructure, inadequate desks, lack of staff accommodation, and automatic promotion. The findings under home-related factors include; parents and caretakers failing to provide meals and scholastic materials, lack of guidance, and failure to attend meetings. The findings under pupil-related factors include; bad company, negative attitude towards education, language problems, and absenteeism. The study concluded that school, home, and pupil factors contribute to unsatisfactory performance in Bombo community UPE schools. The study recommended strengthening and expanding recruitment efforts for teachers, building and maintaining quality facilities, securing government or private funding, and community involvement in all the activities to support the schools.

**KEYWORDS:** Causes, Remedy, academic performance, unsatisfactory performance, Bombo community

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY:

Primary education is the foundation level for education and development in all spheres of life (World Bank, 2010). This implies that for any society to develop quality primary education is a necessary imperative. Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG 4) calls for quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all nations (United Nations, 2015). Similarly, Uganda's Vision 2040 aims to provide quality education to its citizens and to develop continuous education in the country. Without a good foundation at the primary level, the dream of lifelong learning may be shattered. Quality education focuses on the whole child; the social, emotional, physical, mental, and cognitive development of the child.

This study focuses on the academic performance of learners at Bombo community primary schools. Academic achievement is measured by the set grades, examinations, and the ultimate scores (Kimata et al., 2023). Kimata et. al (2023) also observed that school teachers' efforts and parents' or guardians' support are crucial to the academic achievement of the learner.

Whereas primary education is indeed the foundation of education, the education at this level in the government-aided community primary schools in Bombo leaves a lot to be desired. This is evidenced by the results of primary leaving examinations for the last five years. See the results in Table 1.1 below:

**Table 1.1: primary living examination results for Bombo community UPE schools (2018-2023)**

Year	Enrolment	Div. 1	Div. 2	Div. 3	Div. 4	U (Fail)	X (absent)
2018	610	18	282	147	104	46	13
2019	429	6	147	88	104	72	9
2020	400	13	168	94	87	35	9
2022	505	12	218	97	94	73	12

## Causes and Remedies for Low Academic Performance of Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools

2023	329	8	142	64	59	52	5
TOTA	2,273	57	957	490	448	278	48
L		(2.5%)	(42.1%)	(21.6%)	(19.7%)	(12.2%)	(2.1%)

Source: Head teachers' offices of Bombo community schools

Results from Table 1.1 are generated from the PLE results of five UPE primary schools from the Bombo community in the last five years (2018-2023). Analysis of the results reveals that from a total of 2,273 students who enrolled for PLE, only 57(2.5%) got the first grade, 957(42.1%) got the second grade, 490(21.6%) got the third grade, 278(12.2%) failed, and 48(2.1%) did not sit for exams. Many students scored third and fourth grades, while some pupils failed, and a few were absent from examinations. Therefore, many students do not join good schools which perform better in higher education. Also, many could not be admitted to Universal secondary education because some come from humble families that cannot afford to pay secondary education fees.

In addition, the reports of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and School Management Committee (SMC) indicate concerns raised by teachers, parents, and community members about the unsatisfactory performance of learners in the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE). This is also supported by the report on PLE results (2013-2023) by the District Inspector of Schools-Luweero. Because of these concerns, the researchers carried out the study to establish the causes of this undesirable performance and suggest ways to improve the performance of the learners.

Many factors influence the academic performance of learners at the primary school level. They include individual factors, school factors, home factors, socioeconomic factors, motivation of teachers, medium of instruction, and many more (Hassan, et al., 2020, Nakachwa, 2018, Nantege, 2018). This study explores whether student factors, school factors, and home factors are responsible for the unsatisfactory performance of learners at Bombo community universal primary education schools.

The main objective of the study is to understand pupils' academic performance in Bombo community universal primary education schools.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Explore the causes of pupils' unsatisfactory academic performance in Bombo community universal primary education schools.
2. Suggest a remedy to uplift the pupils' academic performance in Bombo community universal primary education schools.

### Research questions:

1. What factors affect pupil academic performance in Bombo community primary schools?
2. How can the academic performance of pupils be improved in Bombo community primary schools?

## LITERATURE REVIEW:

### Understaffing in Bombo Schools

Consequently, a shortage of teachers increases the student-teacher ratio, resulting in less personalized instruction. According to Ladd and Sorensen (2017), smaller class sizes correlate positively with better academic outcomes due to increased teacher-student interaction. Additionally, the Ugandan Ministry of Education (UNESCO, 2017) cited understaffing as a major cause of poor academic performance, where large class sizes diminish the quality of education. Similarly, Kavuma (2019) found that teacher shortages result in increased workload, leading to teacher burnout and reduced attention per student, particularly in public or government-aided schools like those in Bombo.

According to Mukiibi et al. (2020), teacher shortages in Bombo lead to large class sizes, making it difficult for teachers to manage classrooms effectively and give personal attention to students. This assertion is supported by Mugisha and Oryema (2019), who indicated that the student-teacher ratio in many rural areas far exceeds the recommended levels. This, therefore, negatively impacts both teaching quality and learning outcomes. Kavuma (2019) found that teacher retention is a significant issue in Bombo, where many educators leave rural posts for better opportunities in urban centers. This trend exacerbates the understaffing issue, particularly in government-aided schools, and contributes to lower academic performance.

In Bombo, as in other rural regions of Uganda, the shortage of qualified teachers has been identified as a critical factor contributing to low academic performance. Mugagga and Matovu (2021) found that many schools in Bombo face high teacher-pupil ratios, with some classes exceeding 80 students/pupils per teacher, far above the national standard. The shortage of qualified teachers leads to ineffective teaching, especially in core subjects like mathematics and science.

### Teacher Quality and Pedagogical Skills

The quality of teaching staff significantly impacts student performance. Darling-Hammond (2000) found that teachers' qualifications, experience, and pedagogical knowledge are among the strongest predictors of student achievement. In Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Uganda, poor teacher training, coupled with limited access to professional development opportunities, has contributed to poor academic outcomes (UNESCO, 2014). In Bombo, where teachers face high pupil-teacher ratios, the situation is exacerbated by the absence of continuous in-service training, which hinders their ability to adapt to new educational techniques and effectively address diverse learner needs.

## **Causes and Remedies for Low Academic Performance of Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools**

It is argued that teacher competence has a strong influence on academic performance, particularly in rural areas. The quality of teachers and their pedagogical skills directly affect student outcomes. Mukasa and Ssenoga (2021) noted that in rural schools like Bombo, many teachers lack modern teaching methodologies, especially in critical subjects like mathematics and science. This results in rote learning instead of fostering critical thinking. Nakato and Muwanguzi (2022) further pointed out that many teachers in Bombo are inadequately trained in classroom management, which leads to inefficiencies in maintaining discipline and creating an engaging learning environment. The effectiveness of teachers significantly influences pupil performance. Teachers lacking contemporary pedagogical techniques may struggle to engage students (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Namazzi et al. (2017) found that teachers in Bombo often lack up-to-date pedagogical skills, which limits their ability to engage students effectively. Similarly, Musoke and Batte (2020) report that poorly trained teachers, especially in science and mathematics subjects, result in low pupil outcomes in national exams. Sebunya et al. (2022) further highlighted that many teachers in rural areas such as Bombo are inadequately trained, especially in modern teaching techniques, contributing to poor student engagement and retention of material.

### **Inadequate Infrastructure**

The lack of relevant infrastructure in rural area schools like Bombo is a key factor contributing to low academic performance. Poor infrastructure, including inadequate classrooms, insufficient sanitation, and poorly maintained buildings, can negatively impact student attendance and concentration (Mendell & Heath, 2015). Nyamugasira and Ssempebwa (2019) revealed that schools in Bombo often face challenges related to overcrowded classrooms, insufficient sanitation facilities, and poorly maintained buildings. The study noted that these physical deficiencies significantly affect pupil attendance and concentration levels, leading to poor academic outcomes. Barrett et al. (2019) also stress the correlation between poor learning environments and low academic achievement, citing how overcrowded and dilapidated classrooms affect student morale.

Similarly, Okurut and Kirumira (2020) observed that the absence of basic facilities such as libraries, science laboratories, and safe recreational areas in Bombo schools creates a learning environment that is not conducive to educational success. The researchers argue that infrastructure improvements would greatly enhance the learning experience and performance of pupils. Equally, it should be observed that a significant issue affecting schools in Bombo is the lack of learning materials. Kikomoko et al. (2020) found that many primary schools in the area have outdated or insufficient textbooks, which hinders pupils' ability to study and teachers' ability to deliver comprehensive lessons. Furthermore, Tumusiime and Katushabe (2022) observed that the lack of visual and hands-on teaching aids in rural schools has a particularly negative impact on students' comprehension, especially in science subjects.

The physical condition of schools in Bombo also plays a critical role in academic performance. Nabukenya and Kiggundu (2020) found that most schools in Bombo lack basic infrastructure, such as well-maintained classrooms, sanitation facilities, and libraries. The absence of conducive learning environments creates distractions and reduces pupil attendance. Moreover, Kisembo (2022) revealed that schools with poor infrastructure often face higher rates of absenteeism and teacher turnover, further contributing to low academic achievement.

It is believed that the physical environment in which learning takes place is crucial for academic success. Therefore, poor school infrastructure, such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of desks, absence of well stocked libraries, and inadequate sanitation facilities, directly hinder the learning process (World Bank, 2018). A study by Munyira et al. (2017) on the effects of infrastructure on learning in Ugandan schools revealed that poor facilities contribute to lower academic performance and higher dropout rates. This is particularly relevant in Bombo, where schools suffer from severe overcrowding and lack of basic educational infrastructure like libraries and classrooms. Similarly, the absence of basic facilities like libraries discourages the development of a reading culture, which is essential for improving comprehension and critical thinking skills. Studies by Hassan et al. (2020) further highlight that underfunded schools lacking teaching aids, laboratories, and co-curricular activities experience a decline in pupil engagement, further lowering academic performance.

The quality of infrastructure, teacher availability, and instructional materials play a significant role in shaping academic outcomes. Studies have established that schools with insufficient infrastructure, such as classrooms and libraries, negatively affect pupils' academic success (Nakachwa, 2018). In Kiboga District, for example, Nantege (2018) found that overcrowded classrooms, with teacher-pupil ratios exceeding 1:50, inhibit personalised attention and feedback. This problem is evident in Bombo community primary schools, where pupil-teacher ratios range from 1:50 to 1:70, exceeding the Ministry of Education's recommended ratio of 1:40 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020).

### **Inadequate Desks**

The lack of furniture, such as desks, has been identified as a factor contributing to low performance in Bombo schools. Studies indicate that a lack of basic furniture like desks hampers students' ability to concentrate and take effective notes (Barrett et al., 2019). According to Mugerwa and Mugisha (2018), pupils who do not have desks often have poor posture, struggle to take notes, and get easily distracted. The physical discomfort caused by sitting on the floor also impacts concentration and overall learning efficiency (Aliguma, 2020).

## **Causes and Remedies for Low Academic Performance of Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools**

The lack of adequate desks in rural schools such as those in Bombo significantly affects student concentration and comfort during lessons. Kakaire and Namwase (2021) observed that in many schools, students either sit on the floor or share desks, leading to discomfort and distractions during learning. This situation negatively impacts the attention span and overall engagement of pupils, particularly in larger classes. Kasirye et al. (2022) further highlighted that the scarcity of classroom furniture creates discipline problems and reduces learning efficiency, particularly in overcrowded classrooms.

### **Availability of Teaching and Learning Materials**

In Bombo, the availability of teaching and learning materials is a persistent challenge that affects the quality of education. Akena and Mukyala (2020) revealed that a lack of textbooks, exercise books, and visual aids is a common issue in rural schools. The study found that without adequate learning materials, teachers often resort to lecture-based methods, which limits interactive and practical learning. Moreover, Namiyingo and Kibalama (2021) reported that the shortage of materials, particularly for science subjects, limits the development of critical thinking and hands-on skills among pupils.

A lack of teaching and learning materials significantly affects academic performance in Bombo primary schools. A lack of resources like textbooks, chalkboards, and learning aids contributes to poor academic performance (World Bank, 2018). Tumwebaze and Kyomugisha (2019) argue that the absence of textbooks, chalk, and other materials leaves both teachers and students ill-prepared for effective lessons. This is corroborated by Nakato et al. (2020), who highlighted how insufficient resources lead to a teacher-centred approach that limits student engagement.

The provision of adequate learning materials such as textbooks, exercise books, and other teaching aids is essential for effective learning. A study conducted by Glewwe et al. (2011) in Kenya demonstrated that increased availability of textbooks improved learning outcomes, particularly for high-performing students. In Uganda, however, studies show that many rural schools, including those in Bombo, lack essential scholastic materials (Kagoda & Katabaro, 2013). This shortage forces pupils to share materials, limiting their ability to participate fully in lessons and complete assignments.

### **Parental Involvement and Socio-Economic Status**

Parental involvement in the learning process of their children is another critical factor influencing academic performance in Bombo. Generally, parental involvement has been shown to enhance student achievement, as children whose parents engage in their schooling exhibit higher motivation and success rates (Epstein, 2018). Unfortunately, parental involvement is often limited in rural areas like Bombo, where parents may lack the time, resources, or education to support their children's learning. Kigongo and Ssewanyana (2018) found that many parents in Bombo do not attend school meetings or engage in their children's academic progress due to a lack of education and limited time, often driven by the need to focus on subsistence activities. They also noted that parents involved in school activities, such as attending meetings or supervising homework, contribute to better academic outcomes. This study highlights the connection between low socio-economic status and minimal parental involvement, which directly affects children's school performance. Baguma et al. (2020) also found that schools with active Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) reported higher levels of academic performance.

Furthermore, Ngaka et al. (2018) pointed out that families living in poverty are unable to provide their children with the necessary scholastic materials and nutrition, which are essential for cognitive development and academic success. These economic challenges lead to absenteeism and disengagement from the learning process. In Bombo, parental involvement in children's education is limited due to socio-economic challenges. Namirembe (2021) indicated that parents in this region, often engaged in subsistence farming or small-scale businesses, have limited time to participate in school meetings or monitor their children's academic progress. Moreover, Kabagenyi and Kalibala (2022) argued that parents' low levels of education make it difficult for them to assist their children with schoolwork, further contributing to the performance gap. Besides, Nganda et al. (2021) noted that economic hardships prevent many families from providing essential scholastic materials or paying for supplementary academic resources, which negatively affects student engagement and attendance.

In any education setup, parental involvement in a child's education is widely regarded as a key determinant of academic success. Studies from both developed and developing countries show that when parents are actively engaged in their children's education, children perform better academically (Epstein, 2001; Nyarko, 2011). In Uganda, however, parental involvement is often limited by poverty, illiteracy, and cultural factors (Byamugisha & Ogawa, 2010). Research suggests that the home environment, including parental involvement and socio-economic status, is a significant determinant of pupils' academic success (Telethon Kids Institute, 2021). In the context of Bombo, many parents do not attend school meetings or participate in their children's academic activities, leaving the responsibility for education solely to teachers. This lack of involvement negatively impacts children's motivation and performance. The lack of parental support in providing such essentials is not only a reflection of poverty but also a lack of awareness regarding the importance of education. Research by Chege and Sifuna (2006) underscores the importance of parental engagement in reinforcing school-based learning by ensuring discipline and encouraging reading at home.

## **Causes and Remedies for Low Academic Performance of Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools**

### **Socio-Economic Status**

Socio-economic status (SES) is a critical factor influencing academic performance. Research shows that children from low-income households tend to perform worse academically due to a lack of access to educational resources, poor nutrition, and limited parental support (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

In Uganda, a study by Okurut and Yinusa (2020) found that poverty, particularly in rural areas, leads to school absenteeism and dropout, with many children unable to afford basic educational necessities like uniforms, meals, and scholastic materials. This situation is mirrored in Bombo, where many pupils attend school without lunch or essential supplies, negatively impacting their ability to concentrate and participate fully in classroom activities. Furthermore, the provision of scholastic materials, such as textbooks, pens, and uniforms, has been consistently linked to improved academic performance. Studies show that children without the necessary learning materials experience difficulties participating in class and completing assignments (Ssekamate, 2015).

Socio-economic constraints, including poverty and unemployment, are significant contributors to poor academic performance. The socioeconomic status of families in Bombo significantly impacts pupils' access to education. Mwesigye and Tumushabe (2021) found that children from low-income households are more likely to experience absenteeism due to their involvement in income-generating activities for the family, such as farming or small-scale vending. Moreover, Kasule and Kigongo (2022) highlighted that families with low socioeconomic status are unable to provide basic scholastic materials, which directly affects academic performance. This is compounded by the inability to afford uniforms, shoes, and examination fees. Ngaka et al. (2018) found that, parents struggling with poverty are less likely to provide children with scholastic materials or lunch, resulting in absenteeism and disengagement from learning. This is reinforced by Mwangi and Atwine (2020), who argue that economic hardship directly correlates with poor school attendance and lower student outcomes. Economic hardship affects parents' ability to provide basic educational support, such as meals, books, and uniforms (Engle & Black, 2008). Children from low-income households often underperform academically.

### **Language Barriers**

Language barriers are a notable challenge in Bombo and other rural areas, where many students speak local dialects at home but are instructed in English at school. In areas where the language of instruction differs from the local dialect, pupils often struggle to understand and retain information (Trudell, 2016). Musinguzi et al. (2018) found that language difficulties contribute to comprehension issues and lower pupil engagement, particularly in lower primary levels. The study emphasised that students struggle to grasp the curriculum content when they are not fluent in the language of instruction. This was further supported by Tumusiime and Baguma (2021), who observed that early grade reading assessments in Bombo revealed a significant gap between pupils' literacy levels in English and their performance in other subjects. The language barrier not only affects academic performance but also increases dropout rates in later primary years.

The issue of language barriers has been a significant challenge in most of the Bombo primary schools. Nsamba and Mulindwa (2020) emphasized that children often speak local dialects at home, while English, the official language of instruction, is introduced late in their early education. This language gap creates comprehension difficulties and contributes to poor performance, particularly in English-based subjects. Okurut (2021) added that a lack of effective language support programs exacerbates this challenge, leading to high dropout rates among pupils who struggle with the medium of instruction.

In multilingual countries like Uganda, language barriers significantly affect students' learning experiences. English is the official language of instruction, but many pupils in rural areas speak local languages at home, leading to difficulties in comprehension and expression during lessons (Musisi & Nansozi, 2010). A study by Uwezo (2016) on literacy in East Africa found that a large proportion of Ugandan primary school students cannot read or write proficiently in English, which limits their ability to understand the curriculum and perform well in exams. This is particularly relevant in Bombo, where students' limited English proficiency contributes to poor performance in national exams. According to the 2023 National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) survey report, 73.2% of the 2023 primary six pupils from rural schools, including Bombo, are not proficient in literacy in English. It has been noted that the medium of instruction impacts academic performance. In Uganda, where English is the official language of instruction from the primary level, many children from non-English-speaking households struggle to comprehend lessons and examination questions. A study by Musisi and Nansozi (2010) revealed that students in rural Uganda face challenges with English proficiency, limiting their ability to excel in exams and contributing to widespread underperformance, as seen in Bombo schools.

### **Pupil Absenteeism and Attitude**

Pupil absenteeism is a common issue in rural schools like those in Bombo. Frequent absenteeism, whether due to illness, family obligations, or lack of motivation, directly affects learning outcomes (Chang & Romero, 2008). Nyanzi and Ssekitooleko (2019) found that absenteeism, often driven by health issues, household responsibilities, and economic activities, directly correlates with low academic performance. The researchers observed that students who frequently miss school struggle to catch up with the curriculum, leading to poor exam results. Absenteeism is prevalent in rural schools due to various factors, including health issues, household chores, and economic activities like farming. Nyanzi and Ssekitooleko (2019) found that absenteeism is a significant

## **Causes and Remedies for Low Academic Performance of Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools**

predictor of low performance, as students miss critical instruction time. Akello and Muwanga (2021) also reported that absenteeism due to sickness and lack of parental involvement is rampant in rural schools, including Bombo.

Additionally, Kawuma and Mugabi (2020) pointed out that pupils who exhibit a negative attitude towards education and absent themselves from studies, often due to socio-economic hardships and peer influence, are less motivated to perform well academically. The study highlighted the need for interventions that boost pupil motivation and engagement in the learning process.

A pupil's attitude towards learning significantly influences their academic success. Namisi et al. (2018) discovered that students who exhibited a negative attitude towards schoolwork, often due to external influences or personal challenges, performed worse academically. Kawuma and Mugabi (2020) also found that students with a positive attitude and self-motivation consistently achieved better academic results. A positive attitude towards education correlates with higher achievement. Dweck's (2015) theory on growth mindset emphasizes that children who believe they can improve their abilities through effort perform better academically.

### **Bad Company and Peer Influence**

Peer influence is a major factor affecting pupils in rural schools. Peer influence, particularly from pupils engaged in negative behaviors, is another factor that contributes to low academic performance in Bombo. Mutumba and Nakyeyune (2020) found that students who associate with peers having a negative attitude about education are more likely to disengage from their studies. These peers often encourage absenteeism, indiscipline, and involvement in unproductive activities. Kagolo (2021) highlighted that bad company among pupils also correlates with early school dropouts, which further exacerbates the issue of poor academic performance. Peer influence can negatively affect a child's academic focus and behaviour (Steinberg, 2014). Muwonge and Okurut (2020) found that students surrounded by peers who are disengaged or involved in negative activities tend to exhibit similar behaviours, resulting in poor academic outcomes. This view is supported by Kalule (2019), who highlighted that lack of extracurricular activities leaves students vulnerable to negative peer influence.

Pupil attitudes and behaviors toward education significantly affect their performance. Nantege (2018) found that pupils who associated with delinquent peers, or who did not value education, showed lower academic performance and a higher likelihood of dropping out. This finding is pertinent in Bombo community schools, where negative peer influences, such as involvement in substance abuse (marijuana, "tina," and chewing khat), contribute to indiscipline, absenteeism, and low performance.

### **Impact of Nutrition on Learning**

Research shows a direct positive link between poor nutrition and academic performance. In addition, malnutrition affects cognitive function and school performance (Alderman, 2011). Nutrition has a direct impact on cognitive development and learning outcomes. In Bombo, where many children come from low-income households, malnutrition is common. Kabuye et al. (2020) found that children who attend school without breakfast or adequate meals are less likely to concentrate, leading to poor performance. Besides, Ssewanyana and Nabiryo (2021) observed that schools with feeding programs tend to have higher student attendance and better academic performance than those without such programs. This underscores the importance of proper nutrition for academic success. Children who come to school hungry struggle to concentrate and learn effectively. In rural areas like Bombo, many children attend school without breakfast and lunch, which affects their cognitive function and ability to concentrate. Arua and Mutebi (2019) highlighted that malnourished children are less engaged in class and perform worse on tests. Similarly, Mwanje and Twebaze (2020) reported that school feeding programs improve attendance and performance.

A child's nutritional status plays a vital role in their cognitive development and academic performance. Research has consistently shown that malnutrition negatively impacts children's learning ability and school attendance (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007). In Uganda, the National Planning Authority (NPA, 2020) reported that children in rural areas, including Bombo, are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition due to food insecurity and poor dietary habits. The absence of school feeding programs in many Ugandan primary schools exacerbates this issue, leading to reduced concentration, lower energy levels, and poorer academic performance among pupils. Similarly, parents' inability to provide meals, educational materials, and moral guidance is commonly linked to poor academic performance (Nantege, 2018). Studies by Nakachwa (2018) have shown that pupils who do not receive proper nutrition or meals at school are less likely to concentrate in class, leading to absenteeism and diminished academic engagement. This aligns with findings in Bombo primary schools, where over 90% of pupils reportedly attend classes without lunch, leading to lethargy and absenteeism during afternoon lessons.

### **Lack of Staff Accommodation**

Rural schools, including those in Bombo, often suffer from a lack of staff accommodation, which impacts teacher retention and punctuality. Inadequate staff accommodation in Bombo schools contributes to teacher absenteeism and turnover. Nsubuga and Kamulegeya (2021) found that teachers who live far from school are more likely to miss classes due to transportation challenges. Additionally, Byaruhanga and Katende (2022) indicated that inadequate housing for teachers in rural schools creates job dissatisfaction, making it difficult for schools to retain experienced and qualified teachers. This, in turn, negatively affects academic performance as pupils lack consistent and dedicated instruction. Teacher absenteeism often correlates with unsuitable staff housing. According to research by Alhassan (2020), providing nearby housing increases teacher presence, morale, and community

## **Causes and Remedies for Low Academic Performance of Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools**

engagement. Odongkara (2018) emphasizes that teachers commuting from long distances are more likely to be absent or arrive late, which disrupts learning. Kiwuuwa et al. (2020) note that teachers with on-site accommodation are more involved in extracurricular activities and engage more with students and the community.

In addition to pedagogical skills, the physical presence of teachers is critical. Studies have shown that teacher absenteeism, often driven by low salaries, lack of accommodation, and poor working conditions, and significantly contributes to poor academic performance (Chaudhury et al., 2006). Such conditions are particularly relevant to Bombo primary schools, where teachers are overburdened and lack adequate housing, affecting their morale and availability.

Teacher motivation is another critical factor. According to Nakachwa (2018), inadequate teacher accommodation, low salaries, and lack of professional development opportunities contribute to teacher absenteeism, fatigue, and low morale. This was mirrored in a study conducted in rural Uganda by Ssekamate (2015), which found that well-supported and motivated teachers foster a better learning environment and enhance pupil performance.

### **The Policy of Automatic Promotion**

Qadir and Bushra (2011) found that the policy of automatic promotion negatively affects the overall quality of education since it eliminates competition and, the morale of pupils and teachers alike, lowering the quality of teaching and learning outcomes. Peterson (2015) postulates that automatic promotion instills students with the imagination of the least effort, and transmits an ideology that life is easy. Brown (2008) affirms that automatic promotion mostly has negative impacts.

Further examination of automatic promotion reveals that it does more harm than good. It promotes complacency and disinterest in learning since the students know that repeating a class is out of the question (Hirakawa, 2012).

Anderson (2003) asserts that learners who fail but are promoted automatically may develop a condition known as “learned helplessness.” Learned helplessness is the condition in which a learner does not feel that he/she is not capable of achieving a goal and, as a result, stops trying.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was qualitative and used the phenomenology design. Phenomenology design seeks to enlist information from the respondents without adding the research's bias. The study population included head teachers, directors of studies, teachers, parents, students, and local council members. The head teachers are selected because they manage all activities in the school including academics, and the directors of studies are directly involved in managing academic affairs. The parents are included because they are responsible for their children's education, the learners whose performance is studied, and local council members of the community. The sample included 5 head teachers, five directors of studies, 15 teachers (3 from each school- upper primary), 5 parents (PTA representatives), 10 students of the schools (5 head girls and 5 head boys), and, 4 local authorities (LC I) in the community. Purposive sampling was used to select all participants in the study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and 2 focus group discussions. Documents like reports to the school management committee, PTA, school registers, and disciplinary committee were examined. The Thematic analysis method was used to analyze data. Data was scrutinized, and coded, and keywords and concepts were identified. The data was grouped into categories and themes were generated. Results were presented following the research questions. Verbal quotes were used to support the findings.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **School Factors**

Issues under school-related factors include understaffing, lack of infrastructure, inadequate desks, lack of staff accommodation, and automatic promotion policy.

### **Understaffing**

The findings revealed that the schools are understaffed. The standard teacher-to-student ratio per the Ministry of Education and Sports is 1:40. As it stands, the teacher-to-student ratio in the schools is 1:70 in two schools and, 1:50 in three schools. This lack of sufficient manpower greatly affects the teaching-learning process. It also affects the marking of assignments, exams, and, feedback to pupils. Respondents revealed “The school is understaffed. The available teachers cannot ...properly assess the learners due to overload” (RES, 1). Another head teacher revealed “lack of effective assessment of learners by the teacher” (RES, 2). This concurs with Kashumbusa (2023) who found out that large class size affects the quality of teaching and assessment in public primary schools in Rukungiri. Similarly, Kavuma (2019) found that teacher shortages result in increased workload, leading to teacher burnout and reduced attention per student, particularly in public or government-aided schools.

### **Lack of infrastructure**

The findings revealed that the schools lack appropriate infrastructure like classrooms and libraries. They have few classrooms compared to the number of pupils. Congestion in classrooms negatively affects the learning process since it abstracts the effective delivery of content and mobility. One of the head teachers revealed, “The school needs a block of about six more classrooms to

## **Causes and Remedies for Low Academic Performance of Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools**

accommodate the present population of pupils" (RES, 3). Another head teacher revealed: "The school also lacks a library. This is detrimental to fostering a reading culture and thereby inhibitive to good academic performance" (RES, 5). Werang et al. (2024) highlight the significance of the availability of physical facilities in shaping and supporting student learning experiences to improve the academic performance of learners. Poor infrastructure, including inadequate classrooms, insufficient sanitation, and poorly maintained buildings, can negatively impact student attendance and concentration (Mendell & Heath, 2015).

### **Inadequate desks**

Inadequate desks create congestion on the few desks available, contributing to a poor classroom atmosphere. As a result, the study environment becomes un conducive for academic excellence. One head teacher wrote: "Insufficient desks compared to the learners" (RES, 6). This finding concurs with Mugerwa and Mugisha (2018), who found that pupils who do not have desks often have poor posture, struggle to take notes, and, get easily distracted. The physical discomfort caused by sitting on the floor also impacts concentration and overall learning efficiency (Aliguma, 2020).

### **Lack of staff accommodation**

The schools lack adequate staff quarters to accommodate teachers and administrators. Teachers and administrators have to move long distances to come for duty, which may cause absenteeism and fatigue. One head teacher revealed, a "Lack of accommodation for teachers to facilitate effective service delivery." Ademakinwa et al. (2023) found a significant relationship between proper accommodation and staff performance. Therefore, the government should provide comfortable accommodations for teachers to do their work well.

### **Automatic promotion policy**

The Ministry of Education and Sports (1997) policy does not allow learners to repeat a class. They do not have room for repeaters. The idea behind the policy is that students should acquire knowledge and skills to earn and sustain a living. Therefore, pupils are promoted automatically from one class to another. One teacher revealed: "The Covid-19 Pandemic and the Policy of automatic promotion to the next class greatly affected performance". Okurut (2018) found that automatic promotion negatively affected pupils in Uganda.

### **Home related factors**

The themes under home-related factors include failure to provide lunch, failure to provide scholastic materials, lack of guidance from caretakers, and failure to attend meetings.

### **Failure by parents to provide lunch for their children**

Most parents fail to provide lunch for their children at school. It makes the learners stay at school on an empty stomach from morning to evening. Hungry children cannot concentrate in class, which affects their performance. In addition, when these children go for lunch, they do not return for afternoon lessons. One head teacher revealed, "...95% of the children stay at school from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm on an empty stomach. This is a major contributor to pupil absenteeism and ultimately poor academic performance" (RES, 3). Most of the pupils spend their time at school on an empty stomach. It is challenging for them to learn and perform well under the circumstances" (RES, 8). Another head teacher revealed, "Another factor leading to poor academic performance is the failure by parents to provide meals for their children. This means that the pupils attend classes on an empty stomach. Such a pupil is unlikely to perform well in their studies" (RES, 4). Ntabadde (2020) observed that malnutrition impairs a child's concentration and ability to retain information. In addition, Bassouni, et al. (2021) found that nutritional status may affect learners' cognitive development and academic performance.

### **Failure to provide scholastic materials**

Most parents do not provide their children with scholastic materials like books, pens, pencils, and mathematical sets. Such children are, therefore, handicapped in effective learning and are unlikely to perform well in their exams. Respondents said, "Failure by parents to offer scholastic materials to their children is a major contributory factor towards poor academic performance" (RES, 11). Another head teacher revealed, "Failure by parents to provide scholastic materials like books, pens, pencils, and mathematical sets is a big factor in explaining why pupils do not perform well academically" (RES, 15). A lack of resources like textbooks, chalkboards, and learning aids contributes to poor academic performance (World Bank, 2018).

### **Lack of guidance from caretakers**

Most of the pupils do not receive proper guidance from their parents and guardians regarding education and their future. They attend school without understanding the value of education. Education therefore becomes a mere routine they are undergoing without a sense of purpose. It is unlikely that such children can excel in academic performance. Furthermore, parents fail to take care of their children's discipline. They fail to guide their children to the right path hence children behave in any way they see. Respondents revealed: "There is a high degree of indiscipline by the children emanating from lack of parental guidance and proper care. Such children do not listen to their teachers. An in-disciplined child cannot perform well at school" (RES, 12). Studies from both



## **Causes and Remedies for Low Academic Performance of Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools**

developed and developing countries show that when parents are actively engaged in their children's education, children perform better academically (Epstein, 2001; Nyarko, 2011).

### **Failure to attend meetings by parents**

Most parents do not attend meetings called by the school yet it is through such meetings that issues concerning the school generally and the pupils individually are raised. It therefore becomes difficult to resolve some pupil-related issues without the input of the parents since they are critical stakeholders in the process of learning. This also leads to poor performance. Thomas (2023) found that parental involvement is responsible for the good academic performance of a pupil in school.

### **Pupil related factors**

Under pupil-related factors, the themes include bad company, negative attitude towards education, language problems, and absenteeism.

#### **Bad Company**

Some pupils socialize with wrong peers who exert negative peer group influence, especially from other children who have dropped out of school and others who are engaged in negative social behavior like smoking Marijuana, sniffing aviation fuel (locally known as "tina"), and chewing mairungi/khat (*Catha edulis*). The leaves of this plant are chewed for stimulant and euphoric effects. It has contributed to indiscipline, poor performance, and school dropout (GD 1). This finding concurs with Mutumba and Nakyeeyune (2020) findings that students who associate with peers with a negative attitude toward education are more likely to disengage from their studies.

#### **Negative attitude towards education**

The study also revealed that some children do not have a positive attitude towards education, hence they do not value their being at school. It has resulted in a low spirit of competition among the pupils, which negatively affects the academic performance of these pupils. A negative attitude can significantly impact learning, like reduced motivation and impaired cognitive functioning. Kawuma and Mugabi (2020) pointed out that pupils who exhibit a negative attitude towards education and are absent from studies, often due to socioeconomic hardships and peer influence, are less motivated to perform well academically. The study highlighted the need for interventions to boost pupil motivation and engagement in the learning process.

#### **Language problems**

The pupils do not want to speak English. Since exams are set in English, pupils are challenged to comprehend and answer questions. It results in poor performance of such pupils. The researchers opine that "communication is a crucial aspect of teaching and learning. Without proper language appreciation, the learners cannot grasp the content and also fail to answer questions..." (GD 1). This finding concurs with Musinguzi et al. (2018) that language difficulties contribute to comprehension issues and lower pupil engagement, particularly, in lower primary levels. They emphasized that students struggle to grasp the curriculum content when they are not fluent in the language of instruction.

#### **Absenteeism**

Some pupils do not attend class regularly because sometimes they are left to take care of their homes in the absence of their parents. This absenteeism has contributed a lot to poor academic performance. One head teacher wrote "High rate of absenteeism on the part of the learners affects their ability to perform better" (RES 16). This study agrees with Twesigye (2023) who found that absenteeism hurt pupils' academic performance in Rukungiri District.

#### **Solutions to the challenges**

Solutions are suggested to address the learners' academic performance through discussions, observations, and literature review. They are:

#### **School Factors**

To address the school-related factors, the schools should strengthen and expand recruitment efforts, build and maintain quality facilities, secure government or private funding, and community involvement.

#### **Understaffing**

To address the understaffing challenge, the researchers suggest the ministry of education should strengthen and expand recruitment efforts. There are many qualified teachers in Uganda, however because of poor conditions of work, many teachers leave the teaching profession to seek other employment opportunities. Therefore, there is need to increase the budget of the teaching profession to enhance the salary of teachers and improve the conditions of work. Also, employ more teachers to fill the gap.

#### **Lack of infrastructure**

Several measures can be employed to address the lack of infrastructure in schools. Schools should build and maintain quality facilities that can last for long. Secondly, secure government or private funding to set up infrastructure. Every financial year the

## **Causes and Remedies for Low Academic Performance of Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools**

local government provides a budget for infrastructure improvement or development of schools in the area, therefore, the school administrators should put in their requisition for consideration. The administrators can also look for private partners to support the infrastructure needs. Such funds can be used to construct new classroom blocks, furniture, sanitation facilities, and other necessary infrastructure (GD 2.)

Schools should explore community involvement to develop infrastructure. School administrators should encourage the local community, parents, and learners to participate in infrastructure renovation and development projects. It can help to generate additional resources and foster a sense of ownership and pride in the school. Success stories reveal that community members have provided bricks, trees for timber, labor, and other kinds of assistance. It has supported infrastructural development and the provision of furniture.

### **Accommodation challenge**

To manage the challenge of staff housing, first of all, the schools that can afford should rent teachers' houses near the school to accommodate the staff. This will make it easy for the teachers to arrive early at school and attend to the learners.

Secondly, schools should involve the community to support the construction of the staff houses. The community can provide some resources to support housing projects. Schools should also look for companies and well-wishers to support their housing projects. As a long-term solution, the government should partner with private developers to construct houses for teachers of public schools. This can help in reducing the challenge of teachers' houses. To support the financing of housing projects, prospective developers can exploit alternative funding sources like Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations (SACCOs), joint venture financing, and investment clubs which have gained grounds in the country instead of the traditional sources of commercial banks and financial lending institutions (Knight-Frank, 2022).

### **Home related factors**

Solutions to home-related factors include; a multi-sector approach to provide feeding, parental involvement, and role modeling.

### **Provision of lunch to children**

A multi-sector approach can be used to offer solutions to nutrition challenges in schools. In this approach, all sectors work together to handle the issue. District officials work with communities and schools to address the feeding issues of learners. The success story of Kole District revealed that schools grow a variety of food to feed the learners, and they are supported by parents in that endeavor. This has greatly improved the attendance and performance of learners in Kole District in Uganda (Ntabadde, 2020).

### **Parental involvement**

Mahuro and Hungi (2016) studied parental participation in children's schooling and academic outcomes. He observed that parental involvement entails time and resource commitment toward a child's academic performance. Their study concluded that parental participation is crucial in motivating children to improve their academic performance. Parenting and communication play a significant role in improving the academic performance of learners. Therefore, parents from the community in Bombo should be sensitized to communicate effectively with their children and to take parenting responsibly to enable their children to perform better. The researchers opine that parents should encourage their children to study and reward them whenever they perform well. They should always point out to them the most important figures in society who have excelled due to education. Parents should discipline their children and behave well because children imitate their guardians.

### **Good Role Models**

Research by Atif, et al. (2022) found that adolescents with a role model have a higher interest in education, engage in less risky behaviors, and have higher confidence levels compared to adolescents who do not have a role model. The presence of good role models in our communities is an essential ingredient in promoting interest in education.

### **Solution to learners related factors**

Suggestions for learners' challenges include transformative learning, sensitization about the values of education, and continuous assessment.

Transformative learning can address the problems that occur. Therefore, learning should be based on a critical attitude towards the self and environment of the learners. This learning informs us that learning brings action and reflects efforts. Educators stimulate change in the attitude and behavior of students (Surahman, 2023).

Secondly, schools and other stakeholders should continue sensitizing the learners and parents about the values of education. University students should visit schools and encourage learners to study, do career guidance, and more. The schools can invite various professionals to showcase the career options available. It might motivate students to have higher aspirations.

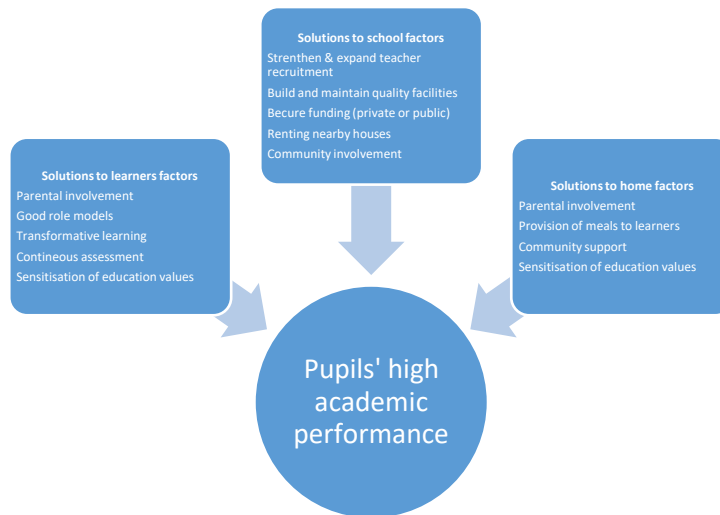
Continuous assessment is also one of the ways to improve performance. The schools should do weekly exercises in class, monthly tests, and end-of-term exams. Such assessment will enable the teachers and learners to identify areas of weakness and generate solutions to address them.

# Causes and Remedies for Low Academic Performance of Bombo Community Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that school, home, and pupil factors contributed to the unsatisfactory performance in Bombo community UPE schools. The study developed a tool in Figure 1.1 below to help improve pupils' academic performance in Bombo community UPE schools.

### Tool 1: Tool to improve pupils' academic performance in Bombo community UPE schools



Source: Field study, 2024

The researchers resolved that to improve the performance of Bombo community UPE schools, the above tool should be adopted by the stake holders. The school administration should make efforts to engage all the stakeholders to use the tool in figure 1 above to improve pupils' performance in Bombo community UPE schools.

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