

# STUDY REPORT 2026

THE SITUATION OF  
TEACHERS IN PRIMARY  
AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS  
IN UGANDA





## STUDY REPORT

# ASSESSING THE SITUATION OF TEACHERS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN UGANDA

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December 2025

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The successful completion of this study reflects the dedication, expertise, and collaboration of many individuals and organisations.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the research team at Luigi Giussani Foundation (LGF). We especially thank Mr. Edimond Serwanga, Senior Officer - Monitoring, Evaluation, Advocacy, Research and Learning, who was the Principal Investigator in this study, for his leadership and commitment. We also acknowledge the Co-Investigators: Mr. Martin Ariapa, Senior Manager - Monitoring, Evaluation, Advocacy, Research and Learning; Mr. John Muhangyi, Senior Manager - Program Design, Development and Quality Assurance; Mr. Emmanuel Adengo, Manager - Education Systems Strengthening / LIT Consortium Manager; Ms. Caroline Kabega, Projects Manager; Ms. Dinah P. Akurut and Ms. Gillian P. Atuheire for their collective effort, experience, analysis and knowledge, which were central to the design and completion of this study.

We further appreciate the partnership and support of our colleagues at Oxfam: Ms. Charlotte Beyer, Senior Education Advisor and Mr. Philip Talemwa, Transformative Education Co-ordinator, among others. Our sincere thanks go to all staff who contributed to the study, helping strengthen the process and uphold high standards of quality.

We are equally grateful to the Research Assistants, who carried out data collection with great diligence. Our heartfelt thanks also go to the teachers, headteachers, and district leaders who generously shared their time and perspectives. Your insights were vital in painting a picture of the current realities facing teachers.

**Lastly, we extend our profound gratitude to the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs through their strategic partnership with Oxfam Denmark and funding through Oxfam Uganda, which made this study possible.**

To everyone involved – thank you for your dedication, collaboration and invaluable contributions to the successful completion of this work.

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**LIST OF ACRONYMS:**

|        |                                                                  |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FGD    | Focus Group Discussion                                           |
| DEO    | District Education Officer                                       |
| DES    | Directorate of Education Standards                               |
| DIS    | District Inspector of Schools                                    |
| IDI    | In-depth Interview                                               |
| KII    | Key Informant Interview                                          |
| LGF    | Luigi Giussani Foundation                                        |
| MoES   | Ministry of Education and Sports                                 |
| MoH    | Ministry of Health                                               |
| NCDC   | National Curriculum Development Centre                           |
| NGOs   | Non-Governmental Organisations                                   |
| OECD   | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development           |
| PLE    | Primary Leaving Examinations                                     |
| PTA    | Parents-Teachers Association                                     |
| SDGs   | Sustainable Development Goals                                    |
| SOPs   | Standard Operating Procedures                                    |
| TETD   | Teacher Education Training and Development                       |
| UCE    | Uganda Certificate of Education                                  |
| UNCST  | Uganda National Council for Science and Technology               |
| UNEB   | Uganda National Examinations Board                               |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNHCR  | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees                    |

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of global development. International commitments, from the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the Sustainable Development Goal 4, affirm the responsibility of education systems to deliver free, inclusive, equitable, and high-quality learning for all learners, including those in crisis-affected contexts. Despite this global mandate, many learners continue to face persistent barriers such as discrimination, exclusion, and gender inequality. These challenges highlight the urgency of strengthening education systems so they can respond effectively to diverse learner needs.

Teachers are central to achieving these goals. Their skills, well-being, working conditions, and access to meaningful professional development directly shape the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms.

It is within this context that Luigi Giussani Foundation, guided by the Teacher Assessment Framework developed by Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education (LGIHE) and Oxfam, conducted a study to assess the teaching and learning situation of primary and secondary teachers in both refugee and non-refugee settings across the West Nile and Karamoja sub-regions. The study sought to: (i) explore how teachers create, promote and utilise a supportive teaching environment that enhances their professional growth and well-being; (ii) establish school and community practices that enhance child protection, wellbeing, and inclusion; (iii) assess teachers' practices on classroom management, instruction and assessment; (iv) establish teachers' understanding of the curriculum and how it informs teachers' practices; and (v) establish language support strategies used by teachers to promote learning in schools.

### Method

The study adopted a cross-sectional mixed-methods design, using qualitative and quantitative approaches concurrently to provide a comprehensive understanding of teaching and learning practices. The quantitative component assessed teachers' levels of competence across key dimensions influencing their practice, including pedagogy, leadership and management, community relations, peer collaboration, and ICT access and usage. Complementing this, the qualitative component explored in depth participants' perspectives on teachers' roles and wellbeing, child protection, inclusion, pedagogy, curriculum and planning, and subject knowledge.

Data collection took place in July 2025, utilising multiple tools and methods: (i) survey with teachers, using a questionnaire; (ii) classroom observations using an observation guide; (iii) in-depth interviews with headteachers and district education officials; (iv) focus group discussions with teachers; and (v) group interviews with PTA, SMC, and BOG representatives.

The study covered 204 schools (145 primary and 59 secondary). A total of 1,716 teachers (1,151 in primary and 565 in secondary) completed the surveys. In addition, 116 classrooms were observed (76 primary and 40 secondary); 22 focus group discussions were conducted (11 primary and 11 secondary); 19 group interviews (10 primary and 9 secondary); 24 headteachers were interviewed (12 primary and 12 secondary), and six district education officials participated in key informant interviews.

### Key Findings

***Objective: To explore how teachers create, promote, and utilise a supportive teaching environment that enhances their professional growth and well-being.***

**Primary schools:** Teachers reported strong leadership and management ( $M = 4.54$ ) and collaboration skills ( $M = 4.56$ ), with teachers in Karamoja scoring slightly higher than West Nile and no major gender gaps. Qualitative data showed structured induction systems, ongoing peer mentoring, internal workshops, exposure visits, and open sharing of materials. Supervision was largely supportive and reflective rather than punitive. These practices created collegial, trusting environments that strengthened teachers' skills, confidence, and wellbeing.

**Secondary schools:** Secondary teachers also reported high leadership ( $M = 4.57$ ) and collaboration ( $M = 4.61$ ), with teachers in West Nile rating themselves higher than Karamoja. Female teachers scored significantly higher than male teachers, particularly in West Nile, highlighting their strong role in fostering supportive professional

cultures. Schools used team teaching, joint planning, departmental note writing<sup>1</sup>, peer observation, and periodic workshops to strengthen instructional practice. Supportive supervision and occasional district capacity building reinforced continuous learning. Beyond instructional collaboration, staff provided emotional and social support through shared problem-solving, resource sharing, and informal counselling, which helped reduce stress, maintain motivation, and support better teaching.

**Objective: To establish school and community practices that enhance child protection, wellbeing, and inclusion.**

**Primary schools:** Teachers reported strong community engagement skills ( $M = 4.61$ ), with similar ratings across genders and slightly higher scores in Karamoja. Qualitative evidence showed active child protection structures—committees, guidance units, referrals to health facilities, collaboration with local leaders, and regular engagement with parents and SMCs. Some Karamoja schools additionally offered routine health screening, counselling, and menstrual hygiene mentoring. Teachers made deliberate efforts to promote inclusion through balanced participation, mixed-gender groups, and attention to learners with disabilities. Observations confirmed these practices, though application was inconsistent, especially in some West Nile schools where unintentional gender favouritism appeared in lessons.

**Secondary schools:** Teachers reported strong community relations ( $M = 4.62$ ), with West Nile scoring slightly higher and female teachers reporting significantly higher competence overall. Schools supported child protection, inclusion, and wellbeing through bursary schemes, guidance and counselling, active referrals to authorities and health services, and structured parent engagement. Co-curricular activities, including mentorship programmes, peace and debate clubs, and sports provided emotional and social support, including for refugee learners. Teachers described efforts to include shy learners, identify special needs, and ensure gender-balanced participation. Classroom observations confirmed many of these practices, though some classes continued to show unintentional gender bias or uneven support for learners with specific needs.

**Objective: To assess teachers' practices on classroom management, instruction and assessment.**

**Primary schools:** Teachers rated their pedagogical skills highly ( $M = 4.38$ ), with higher scores in Karamoja and no gender differences.

- *Planning and preparation:* Most teachers planned for lessons—about 68.4% had both schemes of work and lesson plans, and 22.4% had one of the two. Where plans existed, they aligned well with delivery and supported clear, structured lessons. However, planning remained uneven: a minority had no documents, some schemes did not match lessons taught, and some teachers did not fully implement planned activities. This reflects good basic preparation but gaps in consistency and long-term planning.
- *Classroom control and management:* Teachers generally maintained safe, orderly classrooms and used a wide variety of strategies including routines, movement, questioning, humour, and positive reinforcement to sustain attention. Relationships were mostly warm and respectful, supporting confidence and participation. Persistent environmental risks such as overcrowding, unsafe or cramped furniture, and untidy classrooms undermined safety and attention. Behaviour management was also inconsistent; corporal punishment, harsh tones, and neglect were still observed in some classrooms, creating fear and weakening supportive learning climates.
- *Delivery and presentation:* Many teachers attempted to involve learners through questioning, reading aloud, demonstrations, and occasional group work. Strong examples showed creative use of locally available materials and real-life examples that made learning concrete. A few teachers linked lessons to learners' lives and used translation to support understanding. However, participation often remained teacher-led. Inquiry, discussion, and learner-initiated questions were rare, and use of learning materials uneven. ICT use was nearly absent, constrained by skills and resources. Relevance to everyday life varied, with many lessons relying heavily on textbooks and abstract explanations.
- *Assessment:* Teachers used a mix of formative and summative techniques, including questioning, short exercises, and practical tasks. Many corrected work immediately, explained errors, and occasionally facilitated peer assessment. Some used assessment information to plan remedial support. Yet assessment quality was inconsistent. Questioning was often limited to recall, with little emphasis on reasoning or application. Peer and self-assessment were rare, and record keeping was weak, limiting tracking of learner progress and targeted support.

<sup>1</sup> Departmental note writing refers to the collaborative development and review of lesson notes and teaching materials within a department, supporting peer learning, feedback, and sharing of teaching practices.

- *Gender and inclusion:* Several classrooms demonstrated inclusive practices—seating learners with disabilities strategically, slowing pace, offering additional explanations, and ensuring boys and girls shared participation and leadership. Teachers frequently checked on individual learners and supported those who struggled. Still, inclusion was uneven. Some learners with disabilities received no adaptations, and support for slower learners varied widely. Gender imbalances in participation persisted in some classes, and few teachers used lessons to challenge stereotypes or actively promote gender-equitable norms.

**Secondary schools:** Teachers rated their pedagogical skills highly ( $M = 4.38$ ), and no differences between Karamoja and West Nile. At aggregate level, female teachers reported higher scores than male teachers.

- *Planning and preparation:* Just over half of secondary teachers (52.5%) had both schemes of work and lesson plans, and a further share had one of the two. Where these documents were available, they aligned well with classroom delivery and supported clear sequencing of content and activities. However, a sizeable proportion (27.5%) lacked either document while others struggled to complete planned content in the allocated time. This pointed to widespread inconsistent preparation in some schools, time management, and adherence to curriculum expectations reducing clarity of transitions and weakened assessment opportunities.
- *Classroom control and management:* Most classrooms were physically safe, orderly, and reasonably well organised, with clear desk rows, good ventilation, and visible pathways. Teachers used questioning, rules for turn-taking, and calm reminders to sustain attention, and relationships were largely respectful and supportive, which encouraged participation. On the other hand, overcrowding, broken furniture, dust, and unmanaged hazards remained in some classrooms, a few teachers relied on harsh language or threats of physical punishment, and conflict resolution remained largely teacher-led, limiting learners' opportunities to practise empathy, negotiation, and shared problem-solving. These patterns showed that while many classrooms provided a positive climate, safety management and rights-based discipline were not yet consistent across schools.
- *Delivery and presentation:* Many teachers went beyond lecture, using group work, questioning, demonstrations, and occasional role play to engage learners. Some lessons showed resourceful use of charts, simple science apparatus, real objects, and limited ICT, and several teachers linked content to familiar experiences in home life or the local environment and invited learners' own examples. Yet, group work was often mechanical, with copying from textbooks instead of discussion, and participation stayed strongly teacher-led. Chorus answers, note dictation, and textbook-driven examples dominated, while learner questions, inquiry, and varied grouping strategies were limited. ICT use remained rare and shallow despite high self-reported access, and in many lessons, content remained abstract and tied to textbooks, with weak or superficial links to learners' everyday realities.
- *Assessment:* Most teachers used a mix of assessment methods, including end-of-topic tests, questioning, short written tasks, group presentations, practical demonstration, and research tasks. Many gave immediate oral feedback, corrected errors during lessons, and kept formal records of continuous assessment and examinations for UNEB requirements. Formal records for examinations and structured tests were usually well maintained. In contrast, daily classroom assessment results were seldom recorded systematically, which constrained data-driven planning for remedial support and longer-term tracking of individual progress. Questioning often focused on recall and attentiveness rather than reasoning or application, and peer and self-assessment remained occasional rather than routine features of classroom practice.
- *Gender and inclusion:* Observed classrooms showed clear intent to promote inclusion and gender balance. Teachers often seated learners with disabilities where they could see or hear better, adjusted board writing, allowed extra time, and involved them in group work and demonstrations, sometimes supported by peers. Many teachers also alternated between boys and girls when asking questions, formed mixed-gender groups, and tried to share leadership roles across genders. However, systematic identification and follow-up support for learners with disabilities or persistent learning difficulties were limited, and some teachers still focused mainly on active or front-row learners. Group dynamics sometimes reinforced stereotypes, with girls pushed into secretarial roles and boys assuming chair or moderator positions, and teachers rarely challenged these patterns, leaving inclusive and gender-transformative practice uneven across schools and subjects.

## Conclusions

The study reveals a mix of strong practices and areas requiring urgent support across both primary and secondary levels. Strong leadership, collaboration, community relations, and mentorship reflected professional identities rooted in mutual help, reflective practice, and concern for learner wellbeing—even in resource-constrained settings—thereby enhancing supportive teaching environments. School and community practices around child protection, wellbeing, and inclusion were active and multilayered, with counselling, referrals, and co-curricular clubs supporting vulnerable learners. Teachers and headteachers often framed supervision as supportive rather than punitive, and female teachers, in particular, appeared to anchor communication with parents and communities.

Pedagogical practice showed a blend of strength and constraint with most teachers engaged in meticulous planning, maintained generally safe and orderly learning environments, used questioning, group work, and written exercises, and drew on local examples and materials to support understanding. Where these elements came together, learners experienced structured lessons, warm relationships, and ongoing feedback. Inclusion and gender sensitivity were visible but inconsistent. Many teachers adjusted seating, pacing, and grouping to support learners with disabilities and those who struggled, and aimed for gender balanced participation and leadership.

However, uneven application across classrooms, continued use of corporal punishment, and residual gender bias in participation and role assignment showed rights based and gender responsive practice remained incomplete. Overcrowded classrooms, weak long-term planning, heavy reliance on recall questions and note-giving, limited inclusive practices, narrow assessment approaches, and inconsistent record keeping further reduced depth of learning and constrained sustained support for individual progress. Moreover, group work and classroom roles often reproduced familiar gender stereotypes, and only a few teachers used lessons to challenge these norms.

Curriculum understanding appeared stronger on paper than in daily practice, especially at secondary level, where workload, partial training coverage, material shortages, negative attitudes, and uncertainty around assessment requirements hindered full adoption of competence-based approaches. Language practices also highlighted a tension between policy and learning needs. Teachers at both levels relied heavily on English, often under strict school rules, despite learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds and uneven exposure to the language. Many primary teachers used translation, local languages, and realia to support comprehension, but these strategies were inconsistent. Secondary classrooms offered even less scaffolding, raising concerns about participation and achievement for learners with weaker English proficiency.

Overall, the findings point to a committed teaching force with valuable informal support systems and promising practices, operating within structural, pedagogical, and linguistic constraints that limit consistent delivery of inclusive, learner-centred, competency-oriented education.

## Recommendations

Based on the study findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

- *Strengthen implementation of continuous professional development:* School leadership should institutionalise departmental reflection meetings, structured staff induction, mentoring cultures, periodic internal refresher trainings, and supportive supervision in all schools. District education officers and inspectors of schools should reinforce these efforts through regular monitoring visits and targeted technical support.
- *Improve implementation of policies that promote learner-friendly environments:* District education officials should sensitise headteachers and teachers on existing laws and policies such as the Children Act 2016 (Amended) and related MoES guidelines. Headteachers should lead school-wide agreements that replace corporal practices with clear rules, positive discipline, and restorative conversations. Training and ongoing coaching should support teachers to use non-violent behaviour management, including clear routines, proactive reminders, movement around class, and restorative dialogue, so that harsh tones, intimidation, and corporal punishment seen in some lessons give way to safe, trusting relationships.

- *Enhance teachers' capacity to deliver the competency-based curriculum:* Since many teachers still struggle to interpret and implement the competence-based curriculum, there's need provide targeted training for teachers, especially those who have not yet received adequate guidance. A different delivery model from the current cascade approach should be adopted by NCDC to expand reach and quality. Priority areas should include assessment for learning and systematic record keeping, handling of project work, planning and preparation, use of learner and teacher guides, and ICT integration. At school level, structured and periodic refresher sessions and peer mentorship should reinforce this understanding and link it directly to classroom practice.
- *Retool teachers in ICT for lesson delivery:* Given the minimal use of ICT in lesson delivery and the professed gaps, schools should strengthen teachers' knowledge and skills in digital pedagogy. Training should focus on simple, practical strategies for integrating ICT into planning and classroom delivery. Schools should introduce clear ICT routines, agreed guidelines for safe use of personal devices, and structured support for integrating short videos, images, simulations, or e-books into lessons in ways that involve learners, not only teachers.
- *Ensure availability of sufficient reference materials and resources:* Since inadequate textbooks, curriculum copies, and reference materials hindered preparation in many schools, headteachers should prioritise procurement of enough learner and teacher guides for all subjects. NCDC should ensure timely distribution of curriculum materials and, where possible, issue guidance on publishers whose textbooks align with curriculum expectations to steer school procurement. Alongside print materials, schools should plan for basic ICT resources, including secure storage and maintenance, to support both curriculum implementation and the ICT-related expectations of the competence-based approach.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study

Education is widely recognised as a fundamental human right and a key driver of development at individual, local, national, and global levels (OECD, 2010, 2020; Spiel et al., 2018). It plays a crucial role in fostering social cohesion, addressing psychosocial needs, and providing a safe and stable environment for children and youth especially in crisis contexts, where education not only ensures continuity of learning but also offers a sense of normalcy for learners and often serves as the key to unlocking a different and more sustainable future (Kooser, 2017; UNICEF, 2022).

At the centre of any education system are teachers, whose quality and effectiveness directly shape students' learning experiences and outcomes (Alasuutari et al., 2019; Chow et al., 2024; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018; Sargrad et al., 2019; Shields et al., 2017). Indeed, the overall quality of an education system is closely linked to the calibre of its teachers (Atuhaire & Zhicheng, 2018; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Sheehan & Childs, 2012). Teachers are expected not only to deliver curriculum content but also to respond to diverse learner needs, foster supportive learning environments, and contribute to students' holistic development. It's imperative that their individual quality, and consequently the overall quality of teaching, meet acceptable standards. Teachers should be capable of delivering high-quality instruction and providing targeted and individualised support to different learners based on their specific needs (Chow et al., 2024).

However, teaching quality is influenced by a wide range of interrelated personal, institutional, and systemic factors. These include the contexts in which teachers operate, conditions within the education system, school environments, and classroom dynamics (Cordingley et al., 2019; OECD, 2021). Given these complexities, teachers may encounter significant challenges in effectively fulfilling their roles. Without adequate support, empowerment, and resources, they may struggle to provide high-quality instruction and meet expected standards, potentially limiting student learning outcomes and reinforcing existing inequalities in education.

In recent decades, the expectations placed on teachers have expanded further with the global emphasis on inclusive and equitable education. International frameworks such as the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the UNESCO Salamanca Statement assert that all learners have the right to access quality education within regular educational environments (UNESCO, 1994). This commitment has been reinforced through global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," with particular attention to vulnerable and marginalised groups (Advocates for International Development, 2022). Similarly, the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 highlights the principle of "leaving no one behind," including learners affected by crises (UNESCO, 2016).

These global commitments place significant responsibility on teachers to address learner diversity and ensure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, can participate meaningfully in education. This includes supporting learners who are disadvantaged due to gender, disability, displacement, or socioeconomic status (Smith-Khan & Crock, 2018). While progress has been made towards expanding access to education, many learners continue to experience exclusion, discrimination, and inequality (Humanity & Inclusion, 2021; UNHCR, 2023; UNICEF, 2022; United Nations, 2022; Walton et al., 2020). As a result, achieving the goals of inclusive education and SDG 4 remains a significant challenge.

In Uganda, research underscores the impact of teacher quality on the differences in student learning outcomes within schools (Atuhaire & Zhicheng, 2018; Buhl-Wiggers et al., 2018; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019; Tsimpo & Wodon, 2023). Yet, the quality of Ugandan teachers has been found lacking, a situation worsened by the limited availability of continuous professional development opportunities for teachers (Ministry of Education and Sport, 2014). These challenges are particularly significant in contexts where teachers are expected to respond to increasingly diverse classrooms while operating within resource-constrained environments.

Therefore, to effectively deliver quality and inclusive education that caters to the learning needs of all learners, it's crucial to empower teachers, improve their working conditions, and offer professional development and support that enhances their skills and capabilities (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Andiemba, 2021; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2015; Ionescu & Vršmaš, 2023; Nwoko et al., 2023; Sargrad et al., 2019; Ulferts, H., 2021; Walker et al., 2019; Woodcock et al., 2022). Carefully designed and appropriate professional development programs are crucial for effectively equipping, motivating, and empowering teachers

(Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Council of the European Union & European Commission, 2015; Duncan et al., 2021). Furthermore, in their review of research on teachers' perceived support needs for implementing inclusive education, Chow et al. (2024) reported that teachers frequently advocate for suitable teacher professional learning opportunities.

Despite the acknowledged role of professional development programs in empowering teachers to deliver quality and inclusive education, not all of these initiatives are effective in achieving this goal (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Mizell, 2010). Many programs fail to address the specific needs and challenges faced by teachers within their particular contexts (Mizell, 2010). To be effective, a professional development program must be designed to align with the needs of teachers within their specific contexts, their experiences, and the established teaching standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Accordingly, it is essential to understand the overall situation of teachers in a given context, identify the challenges they face when delivering lessons in the classroom, and uncover the needs and gaps for continuous professional development, administrative and technical support, and wellbeing. In addition, teachers' engagement with and relationships within the communities they serve are critical, as these interactions can shape teaching practices, influence learner participation, and affect the broader inclusivity and responsiveness of education. Furthermore, it's crucial to comprehend the interconnection between teachers and the education system with the technical aspects of the administrative and political systems, as well as how teachers and the broader education system are held responsible for adhering to established standards.

Recognising the importance of a teacher situation study in education systems, Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education (LGIHE) and Oxfam developed a Teacher Assessment Framework based on national and globally recognised frameworks and standards such as those set out by the Interagency Network for Education in Emergency (INEE). The developed framework serves as a guide for conducting teacher situational studies in various contexts, including those affected by protracted crises. The Teacher Assessment Framework outlines five key dimensions that impact teachers, namely: Teacher's role and well-being; Child protection, well-being, and inclusion; Pedagogy; Curriculum and planning; and Subject knowledge.

Building on this foundation, Luigi Giussani Foundation (LGF) conducted a study focused on assessing the present circumstances of primary and secondary school teachers, in both refugee and non-refugee settings, within the West Nile and Karamoja sub-regions of Uganda. The findings of this study are expected to guide interventions and inform policy discussions aimed at supporting teachers and improving educational outcomes in marginalised areas of Uganda, both refugee and non-refugee settings.

## 1.2 Study objectives

The purpose of this study is to assess the teaching and learning situation of primary and secondary school teachers in both refugee and non-refugee settings across Uganda's West Nile and Karamoja sub-regions. Specifically, the study aims to:

- (i) Explore how teachers create, promote and utilise a supportive teaching environment that enhances their professional growth and well-being
- (ii) Establish school and community practices that enhance child protection, wellbeing, and inclusion
- (iii) Assess teachers' practices on classroom management, instruction and assessment
- (iv) Establish teachers' understanding of the curriculum and how it informs teachers' practices
- (v) Establish language support strategies used by teachers to promote learning in schools

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Study design

The study adopted a cross-sectional mixed-methods design in which qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed concurrently. This design was selected to generate a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences related to teaching and learning.

The quantitative component aimed to assess teachers' levels of competence across key dimensions influencing their practice, including pedagogy, leadership and management, community relations, peer collaboration, and ICT access and usage. Complementing this, the qualitative component explored in depth participants' perspectives on teachers' roles and wellbeing, child protection, inclusion, pedagogy, curriculum and planning, and subject knowledge. This allowed capturing how teachers navigate the teaching and learning environment. By examining their day-to-day realities, this approach provided nuanced insights into how practices related to child protection, wellbeing and inclusion, pedagogy, curriculum and planning, and subject knowledge are perceived, enacted, and integrated within classroom and broader school settings.

### 2.2 Study scope

#### *Geographic scope*

The study was conducted in Uganda, covering six (6) districts including: Terego, Madi-Okollo, and Yumbe in the West Nile sub-region; and Amudat, Nakapiripirit, and Nabilatuk in the Karamoja sub-region. These districts were selected based on the following criteria: (i) districts in which Oxfam Uganda operates; (ii) and performance rankings of these districts based on the 2023 Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) and Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) results, focusing on low-performing districts in the same year. The actual locations for the study sites are as shown below.

#### *Participant scope*

The study targeted the participation of education stakeholders, including teachers and headteachers or deputy headteachers of the targeted schools, other school leaders such as PTA/SMC/BOG representatives, local government officials such as District Education Officers (DEOs) and District Inspectors of Schools (DIS).

### 2.3 Data collection methods and tools

The study employed the following data collection methods and tools to generate an understanding of the overall situation of teachers:

**Survey:** The survey aimed to evaluate primary and secondary school teachers' competencies in pedagogy, leadership and management, peer collaboration and community engagement. A questionnaire was adapted, considering the teacher competencies listed in the competence profile (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016) for primary school teachers. In addition, the tool included items assessing teachers' access to and integration of ICT tools and resources into their pedagogical practices. The survey was self-administered and conducted using a pencil-and-paper format.

**Classroom observations** were conducted to gain insights into teachers' practices, resource availability, and the overall classroom situation. These observations specifically focussed on assessing the quality of teaching, assessment methods, and the learning environment, providing valuable insights into the overall conduct of lessons. The observers took notes on teachers' practices, paying attention to aspects such as child protection, well-being, inclusion, pedagogical approaches, curriculum planning, and subject expertise.

**Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** with 6 to 10 teachers were conducted to explore their perspectives on aspects related to the different dimensions that affect their practices, including teachers' roles and well-being, child protection, well-being and inclusion, pedagogy, curriculum planning, and subject knowledge. Only teachers who participated in the survey were targeted for the FGDs. A FGD guide was used.

**Group interviews** with 3 to 5 members of the PTA/BOG/SMC committees were conducted to explore their perceptions on aspects that affect them and teachers in general, including teachers' roles and well-being and child protection, well-being and inclusion. An interview guide was used.

**In-depth interviews (IDIs)** with Headteachers or Deputy Headteachers were conducted to explore their perceptions on aspects that affect them and teachers in general, including teachers' roles and well-being, child protection, well-being and inclusion, pedagogy, curriculum planning, and subject knowledge. IDIs were carried out in the same schools where FGDs with teachers took place. An in-depth interview guide was used.

**Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)** with District Education Officers (DEOs) or District Inspectors of Schools (DIS) were conducted to explore perspectives on aspects that affect teacher performance, including teachers' roles and well-being, child protection, well-being and inclusion, pedagogy, curriculum planning, and subject knowledge. A key informant interview guide was used.

## 2.4 Translation and languages of tools

The study tools were available in the primary local language of each respective district. The tools were available in Ngakarimojong, Lugbara, Aringa, Kakwa, Madi, Kiswahili, and Alur. Specifically, the tool that was translated was the discussion guide for BOG, SMC, and PTA representatives as these were expected to include those who are uncomfortable with English Language. Dedicated language experts were hired to carry out the translations, and back translation was conducted to ensure consistency and accuracy of the items/questions.

## 2.5 Face validity and cognitive testing of the tools

Face validity was conducted on the test questions or items to ensure their appropriateness in terms of grammar, clarity, lack of ambiguity, correct spelling, and proper construction. This was achieved through technical reviews by the Oxfam team. Additionally, the study tools were cognitive tested with teachers to evaluate the processes involved in responding to the items, the terminology and words used, and the understanding of translated versions, providing evidence of validity. Any challenges related to the clarity of terms, specific questions, or instructions that arise during cognitive testing were addressed. The cognitive testing also aimed to determine the time required to fully administer the survey, with a target duration of 45 minutes maximum.

## 2.6 Sample sizes and selection

**Survey for teachers:** The assumptions that were taken into consideration for the sample size calculation include:

- A total population of 480 schools (401 primary and 79 secondary)<sup>2</sup> in the six districts
- Z score of 1.96 for a 95% confidence
- 6% margin of error (E),
- p=0.697 proportion of perceived competence by primary school teachers based on study by Poro et al (2019) in Nwoya district, Uganda.
- Unit of analysis is a teacher.

The following formula was used to compute the sample size:

$$= \frac{N * Z^2 * p(1 - p)}{E^2(N - 1) + Z^2 * p(1 - p)}$$

Where n is the sample size and N is the total number of primary and secondary schools in the target districts. This gave a minimum sample of 204 schools (145 primary schools and 59 secondary schools) based on a stratified sampling scheme.

<sup>2</sup><https://kawa.ac.ug/>; [https://karamojaresilience.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/the\\_education\\_system\\_in\\_karamoja\\_revised\\_july\\_17\\_dfid.pdf](https://karamojaresilience.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/the_education_system_in_karamoja_revised_july_17_dfid.pdf); <https://www.education.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Copy-of-All-private-schools-as-at-28th-March-2022-1.pdf>; <https://www.education.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Government-Secondary.pdf>

The number of schools included in the sample from each district were distributed using proportionate allocation according to the total number of schools in each district. Finally, random sampling was applied to select the required number of schools from each district after obtaining a complete list of all schools, separating primary and secondary schools. For refugee hosting districts, selection of target schools aimed to include a representative number of refugee schools as well as host community schools. The sampling involved stratification by status of the schools. Below is a breakdown of number of schools per district.

**Table 1: Number of sampled schools per district**

| District       | Secondary |             |           | Primary   |             |            |
|----------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------|
|                | Refugee   | Non-Refugee | Total     | Refugee   | Non-Refugee | Total      |
| Amudat         | NA        | 3           | 3         | NA        | 11          | 11         |
| Nabilatuk      | NA        | 3           | 3         | NA        | 7           | 7          |
| Nakapiripirit  | NA        | 2           | 2         | NA        | 10          | 10         |
| Madi-Okollo    | 3         | 8           | 11        | 7         | 22          | 29         |
| Terego         | 2         | 14          | 16        | 10        | 23          | 33         |
| Yumbe          | 7         | 17          | 24        | 7         | 48          | 55         |
| <b>Overall</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>47</b>   | <b>59</b> | <b>24</b> | <b>121</b>  | <b>145</b> |

Based on the schools that completed the Annual Schools Census of 2017, there is an average of 12 and 10 primary school teachers and an average of 20 and 19 secondary school teachers in the West Nile and Karamoja sub-regions, respectively (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017). Taking into consideration non-response and absence of teachers on the days of data collection, an average of 8 and 14 teachers in primary and secondary schools, respectively, were targeted for the study, which would result in a minimum of 1,986 teachers (1,160 primary and 826 secondary). At the end of data collection, 1,716 teachers (1,151 primary and 565 secondary) were realised. The table below shows the achieved sample per location.

**Table 2: Number of teachers surveyed in each study district**

| Sub-region        | District      | Refugee    |           | Non-refugee |            | Overall    |            |              |
|-------------------|---------------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
|                   |               | M          | F         | M           | F          | M          | F          | T            |
| Primary schools   |               |            |           |             |            |            |            |              |
| Karamoja          | Amudat        |            |           | 38          | 34         | 38         | 34         | 72           |
|                   | Nabilatuk     |            |           | 35          | 18         | 35         | 18         | 53           |
|                   | Nakapiripirit |            |           | 49          | 27         | 49         | 27         | 76           |
|                   | <b>Total</b>  |            |           | <b>122</b>  | <b>79</b>  | <b>122</b> | <b>79</b>  | <b>201</b>   |
|                   | Madi-Okollo   | 19         | 12        | 112         | 60         | 131        | 72         | 203          |
|                   | Terego        | 69         | 35        | 142         | 83         | 211        | 118        | 329          |
| West Nile         | Yumbe         | 59         | 29        | 219         | 111        | 278        | 140        | 418          |
|                   | <b>Total</b>  | <b>147</b> | <b>76</b> | <b>473</b>  | <b>254</b> | <b>620</b> | <b>330</b> | <b>950</b>   |
| <b>Overall</b>    |               | <b>147</b> | <b>76</b> | <b>595</b>  | <b>333</b> | <b>742</b> | <b>409</b> | <b>1,151</b> |
| Secondary schools |               |            |           |             |            |            |            |              |
| Karamoja          | Amudat        |            |           | 27          | 7          | 27         | 7          | 34           |
|                   | Nabilatuk     |            |           | 28          | 17         | 28         | 17         | 45           |
|                   | Nakapiripirit |            |           | 13          | 7          | 13         | 7          | 20           |
|                   | <b>Total</b>  |            |           | <b>68</b>   | <b>31</b>  | <b>68</b>  | <b>31</b>  | <b>99</b>    |
| West Nile         | Madi-Okollo   | 25         | 18        | 38          | 18         | 63         | 36         | 99           |
|                   | Terego        | 30         | 18        | 85          | 27         | 115        | 45         | 160          |
|                   | Yumbe         | 67         | 39        | 76          | 25         | 143        | 64         | 207          |
|                   | <b>Total</b>  | <b>122</b> | <b>75</b> | <b>199</b>  | <b>70</b>  | <b>321</b> | <b>145</b> | <b>466</b>   |
| <b>Overall</b>    |               | <b>122</b> | <b>75</b> | <b>267</b>  | <b>101</b> | <b>389</b> | <b>176</b> | <b>565</b>   |

The lower sample realised, particularly in secondary schools, was largely attributed to several operational challenges encountered during data collection. Ongoing industrial action by teachers, especially arts teachers in government secondary schools, significantly reduced teacher presence on the days of visitation. The prevalence of part-time teaching arrangements further complicated access, as many teachers were not consistently on site during working hours. In addition, some schools were operating under constrained conditions. Several schools, especially private secondary schools, had generally low staffing levels, which inherently limited the number of teachers available for participation. Collectively, these factors contributed to the shortfall in the actual number of teachers surveyed relative to the initial target.

**Classroom observations:** The lessons of two teachers (one male and one female) from at least 50 schools, representing nearly 25% of the total sample of schools, were observed. For each selected teacher, one lesson was observed. Teachers participating in the classroom observations were randomly selected from the list of all teachers in each of the target schools, that was obtained from the respective school administrators. In total, 116 classrooms were observed. Out of these, 76 observations were done in primary schools (64 in West Nile and 12 in Karamoja) while 40 were in secondary school (32 in West Nile and 8 in Karamoja)

**Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** In each district, four FGDs (two in primary schools and two in secondary schools) were planned with teachers. A total of 22 FGDs were successfully conducted. Of these, 11 were conducted in West Nile (six primary and five secondary) while 11 were conducted in Karamoja (five primary and six secondary). Participating schools were randomly selected from the full list of schools involved in the study.

**Group interviews:** Similarly, four group interviews per district (two in primary and two in secondary schools) were planned with PTA/SMC/BOG representatives. In total, 19 group interviews were completed. Of these, 12 were conducted in West Nile (six primary and six secondary) while seven were conducted in Karamoja (four primary and three secondary). Five interviews in the Karamoja subregion could not be conducted due to competing commitments among targeted participants, including political party election activities occurring during the same period despite prior schedule confirmations. These interviews were conducted in the same

institutions where teacher FGDs had taken place.

**In-depth interviews:** Each district was also expected to have four interviews (two from primary and two from secondary schools) with headteachers or their deputies. Altogether, 24 in-depth interviews were completed. Of these, 12 were conducted in West Nile (six primary and six secondary) and 12 were conducted in Karamoja (six primary and six secondary). Still, these aligned with the institutions where both teacher FGDs and the PTA/SMC/BOG group interviews were conducted.

**Key informant interviews:** In each district, one representative from the education office (either DEO or DIS) participated in the study. In total, six key informant interviews were conducted.

## 2.7 Inclusion and exclusion criteria of participants

### *Inclusion criteria:*

- The study was limited to six districts: Terego, Yumbe, Madi-Okollo, Nakapiripirit, Amudat and Nabilatuk and these were considered due to the presence of Oxfam operations and consistently low performance of learners in PLE and UCE in 2023
- Only schools located within these six districts were eligible for selection
- Only teachers, headteachers, and district officials from the participating schools and districts were included
- All teachers and headteachers employed at the selected schools at the time of the study were eligible
- Participation was restricted to individuals who provided informed consent

### *Exclusion criteria:*

- Any eligible participant who declined or did not provide consent was excluded
- Teachers who felt uncomfortable being observed during lessons were not subjected to classroom observation, although they could still participate in surveys or FGDs if they consented
- Individuals who appeared emotionally or mentally unfit to participate in data collection activities were excluded for ethical reasons
- Target participants (teachers, Headteachers, SMC/BOG/PTA representatives) who were ill or otherwise unable to engage in the study activities at the time of data collection were not included

## 2.8 Data quality control and field work management

**a) Recruitment of the Research Assistants:** Research Assistants from each of the study districts were recruited while considering those who speak the main local languages in the study areas. The selection of Research Assistants was done by the research team. Research Assistants had previous experience conducting research involving different categories of people.

**b) Training of Research Assistants:** All recruited Research Assistants were invited to participate in a two (2) days training prior to the data collection exercise. The training covered various topics including research objectives, interviewing techniques, research ethics, informed consent administration, questionnaire administration, ensuring data quality and integrity, introduction to the code of conduct, and safeguarding and safety protocols. Standard operating guidelines for the research were developed and shared with all the Research Assistants. These guidelines offered guidance on data collection procedures, handling challenging situations, and addressing questions, drawing from the expertise and experience of the study team.

**c) Data collection process:** All data collection tools were translated and back-translated into the primary local languages spoken in the target areas. However, interviews were conducted either in English or the local language, based on the preference of the participants. Teacher surveys were self-administered following the pencil and paper approach with guidance and support from research assistants. Interviews were conducted one-on-one by research assistants. For focus group discussions, research assistants will work in pairs, with one serving as the moderator and the other as the note-taker. Only research assistants who were trained teachers, in addition to key study team members, conducted classroom observations. All interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed by hand to ensure accuracy.

**d) Checks by the Field Supervisors:** Key team members regularly monitored research assistants to ensure adherence to the study protocol. Any missed interviews were promptly reported to the Field Supervisor before research assistants depart from the data collection district. When a research assistant encountered difficulties that they cannot resolve, they will inform the supervisors before leaving the data collection site to ensure that any issues or challenges encountered during data collection can be addressed promptly and effectively.

**e) Quality control for interviews:** Supervision and spot checks were done by the Field Supervisors in order to ensure adherence to the study protocol and confirm the quality of data collected. Therefore, operational phone contacts for each sampled and interviewed respondent shall be captured to allow for double checking of the authenticity of the interviews.

## 2.9 Ethical considerations

The study followed standard guidelines for the protection of human subjects in research. Research assistants were required to strictly adhere to ethical principles designed to protect the rights and dignity of participants, ensure research validity, and maintain integrity. These principles included clearly explaining the study's purpose, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining confidentiality throughout data collection, storage, analysis, and reporting. All research staff were trained on these ethical standards to ensure full compliance. Informed consent was prioritised, with participants receiving detailed information on the study's objectives, methods, risks, and benefits. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Confidentiality was upheld at all stages, with personal information anonymised, securely stored, and accessible only to authorised personnel. Safeguards were put in place to minimise any potential risks, including physical, psychological, or social harm.

We also obtained approval from the MoES, a regulatory body whose mandate is to provide technical support, guidance, coordination, regulation and promotion of quality education, training and sports in the country.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Uganda National Health Laboratory Services Research Ethics Committee (UNHLSREC) and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). Only materials, including study instruments and consent forms, approved by UNHLSREC were utilised in the study. Importantly, the study fully complied with the ethical guidelines set by the UNCST. These measures ensured the protection of participants' rights, the ethical conduct of the research, and the validity of the study findings.

### Risks

Participating in the study did not pose any physical risks to participants. However, individuals might have experienced slight discomfort when reflecting on the questions asked. Additionally, some teachers expressed discomfort during observations. Nevertheless, the study aimed to minimise these risks by strictly adhering to safety and safeguarding guidelines.

### Benefits

We anticipated that participants would find the experience both interesting and educational. Furthermore, the results of this study will enable various stakeholders such as the MoES and development partners to understand the situation of teachers in the Ugandan context which would inform data-driven decision making and evidence-based practices, fostering a more supportive and conducive learning environment.

### Compensation

All individuals involved in the study received compensation to acknowledge their time and contributions, following the ethical guidelines set by UNCST. Teachers participating in the survey and interview participants received UGX10,000 each as compensation for their time and effort. Participants for FGDs each receive UGX. 10,000 and a light refreshment valued at UGX. 2,000. Participants who took part in the KIIs received UGX. 20,000 as compensation for their time and effort. Teachers whose classrooms were observed received no compensation since the observations were conducted within their regular routine activities.

## 2.10 Disease mitigation plan for research team members and participants

The Sudan Ebola Virus Disease (SUDV) outbreak occurred alongside ongoing Mpox and COVID-19 response efforts. Given that these diseases can cause severe illness and may not occur in isolation, participants and research team members were informed that co-infection was possible; an individual with SUDV or Mpox could also contract COVID-19, and vice versa.

The research team adhered to the Ministry of Health (MoH) Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for conducting research during the SUDV outbreak and the continued presence of Mpox and COVID-19. Key mitigation measures implemented during the study included minimising physical contact, avoiding exposure to bodily fluids, and maintaining strict hand and surface hygiene through regular handwashing and sanitisation. These SOPs are outlined in detail in the Annex: *Disease Mitigation Plan for Research Team Members and Participants*.

## 2.11 Data management and Analysis

### (a) Data management

Identifying information was captured separately from questionnaire responses. An electronic dataset containing names and identification numbers was created and stored in a password-protected file on a repository computer at Luigi Giussani Foundation offices. Access to this computer was restricted to the Principal Investigator and the Data Manager. Paper consent forms were kept in opaque folders during fieldwork and subsequently transported to the Foundation's offices in Kampala, where they were securely stored for five years.

Completed hard copies of survey questionnaires and classroom observation forms were stored in opaque folders by research assistants and submitted daily to Field Supervisors. These materials were then transported to Luigi Giussani Foundation offices for data entry. All datasets underwent systematic cleaning and preparation to address missingness, inconsistencies, and errors. Data cleaning was conducted in STATA (Version 16), with procedures fully documented using do-files. The datasets were then pseudonymised to ensure the removal of all identifying information and securely stored in Google Drive with access limited to the Principal Investigator and Data Manager. Once uploaded, all data were deleted from the desktop computers used during data entry. Hard-copy questionnaires and observation forms were stored in locked storerooms for five years.

All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded using encrypted devices with participants' consent. Recordings were transferred to the repository computer at the end of each fieldwork day or as soon as possible. They were then moved to secure desktop computers at the Foundation for transcription and, where necessary, translation into English. After the Data Manager verified the quality of transcripts, all audio recordings were permanently deleted. Identifying information was removed during transcription to ensure complete anonymisation, with all work completed in Microsoft Word. Final anonymised transcripts were stored securely in Google Drive with access restricted to the Principal Investigator and Data Manager, and deleted from the transcription computers after completion.

### (b) Data entry and analysis

**Quantitative data:** Data entry was conducted using Epidata (ver. 3.1), which provides internal checks that minimise input errors, safeguard data integrity, and facilitate seamless export to analytical software. Prior to analysis, rigorous data cleaning procedures were undertaken to identify and correct erroneous records. Missing demographic information such as sex, age, and years of teaching experience and location data including district and school category were updated using attendance records. Quantitative analysis was then performed in STATA (ver. 17), which enabled efficient merging, editing and additional cleaning of datasets. Analyses were carried out at both the univariate and bivariate levels. Summary statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, were produced, and results were visualised graphically where appropriate. Data were disaggregated by teacher category (primary or secondary), district, gender and sub-region (West Nile or Karamoja). Comparative analyses using mean-comparison tests (t-tests) were conducted to assess whether statistically significant differences existed in the teachers' self-reported scores by sex and sub-region.

**Qualitative data:** All interviews and focus group discussions, except those for which participants declined recording, were audio-recorded in the language used during data collection. Audio recordings and field notes were transcribed verbatim by experienced personnel using *Microsoft Word*, while classroom observation data were transcribed in *Microsoft Excel*. A coding scheme aligned with the study objectives and key thematic areas

was developed to guide analysis. The qualitative analysis aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of teacher and school-wide practices and experiences, and to triangulate these findings with the quantitative results. Qualitative analysis followed two complementary approaches:

- Using ATLAS.ti software. An open-coding approach was applied, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data rather than relying solely on pre-set categories. This flexibility ensured that context-specific insights were captured and strengthened the validity of the findings.
- Some data were analysed manually through line-by-line reading to identify patterns and respondent perspectives. This method captured nuanced meanings in participants' own words, further enhancing the depth and authenticity of the results.

## 2.12 Limitations

This study was conducted in a small number of districts in Karamoja and West Nile. As a result, the findings reflect the conditions and experiences specific to these subregions and corresponding districts and may not capture differences that exist in other parts of Uganda. Practices, challenges, and teacher experiences in more urban, better-resourced, or differently structured education settings may therefore be underrepresented, limiting the broader applicability of the results.

During data collection, industrial action by secondary school arts teachers significantly affected participation. Most respondents at secondary level were science teachers, as many arts teachers were absent or unavailable. This imbalance reduced the range of subject perspectives included in the study and may have skewed the findings toward the practices, challenges, and professional realities of science teachers. Consequently, issues specific to arts teachers such as subject-specific pedagogical needs or workload patterns may not be fully reflected in the study's conclusions.

### 3. FINDINGS

The study findings are organised according to the study objectives. For each objective, results for primary and secondary levels are presented separately to reflect differences in their respective levels. The findings presented draw on both the qualitative and quantitative data, integrating insights from multiple data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the results.

#### 3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

A total of 1,716 teachers (primary = 1,151 and secondary = 565) were successfully surveyed across six districts: Terego, Madi-Okollo, and Yumbe in the West Nile subregion, and Amudat, Nakapiripirit, and Nabilatuk within the Karamoja sub-regions. Overall, most teachers surveyed were male (65.9%), with a similar pattern among primary school participants (64.5%) and secondary school participants (68.9%). Primary school teachers had an average age of 39.0 years, ranging from 20 to 61. For secondary school teachers, their average age was 34.5 years ranging from 20 to 65. The demographic characteristics are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Participants' demographic characteristics**

| Variable                                                                                                                                                                          | Primary      |              |              | Secondary    |              |              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                   | Male         | Female       | Total        | Male         | Female       | Total        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                   | n(%)         |              |              |              |              |              |
| Sex                                                                                                                                                                               | 742(64.5)    | 409(35.5)    | 1,151(100.0) | 389(68.8)    | 176(31.2)    | 565(100.0)   |
| Age                                                                                                                                                                               | 40.0(SD=8.9) | 37.3(SD=8.0) | 39.0(SD=8.7) | 35.0(SD=8.2) | 33.3(SD=8.0) | 34.5(SD=8.2) |
| Years at current school                                                                                                                                                           | 4.8(SD=4.8)  | 4.5(SD=3.9)  | 4.7(SD=4.5)  | 4.4(SD=4.1)  | 3.8(SD=3.7)  | 4.2(SD=4.0)  |
| Years of teaching                                                                                                                                                                 | 15.8(SD=7.8) | 13.8(SD=7.1) | 15.1(SD=7.6) | 10.2(SD=7.4) | 9.3(SD=7.6)  | 9.9(SD=7.5)  |
| Highest education level                                                                                                                                                           |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| O' level                                                                                                                                                                          | 47(71.2)     | 19(28.8)     | 66(5.7)      | 2(100.0)     | 0(0.0)       | 2(0.4)       |
| A' level                                                                                                                                                                          | 26(86.7)     | 4(13.3)      | 30(2.6)      | 9(90.0)      | 1(10.0)      | 10(1.8)      |
| Certificate                                                                                                                                                                       | 47(52.2)     | 43(47.8)     | 90(7.8)      | 4(57.1)      | 3(42.9)      | 7(1.2)       |
| Grade III                                                                                                                                                                         | 283(66.0)    | 146(34.0)    | 429(37.3)    | 4(80.0)      | 1(20.0)      | 5(0.9)       |
| Grade V (diploma)                                                                                                                                                                 | 282(63.1)    | 165(36.9)    | 447(38.8)    | 164(71.0)    | 67(29.0)     | 231(40.9)    |
| Bachelor degree                                                                                                                                                                   | 56(65.9)     | 29(34.1)     | 85(7.4)      | 186(65.7)    | 97(34.3)     | 283(50.1)    |
| Master degree                                                                                                                                                                     | 0(0.0)       | 1(100.0)     | 1(0.2)       | 18(75.0)     | 6(25.0)      | 24(4.3)      |
| District                                                                                                                                                                          |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Terego                                                                                                                                                                            | 211(64.1)    | 118(35.9)    | 329(28.6)    | 115(71.9)    | 45(28.1)     | 160(28.3)    |
| Madi-Okollo                                                                                                                                                                       | 131(64.5)    | 72(35.5)     | 203(17.6)    | 63(63.6)     | 36(36.4)     | 99(17.5)     |
| Yumbe                                                                                                                                                                             | 278(66.5)    | 140(33.5)    | 418(36.3)    | 143(69.1)    | 64(30.9)     | 207(36.6)    |
| Amudat                                                                                                                                                                            | 38(52.8)     | 34(47.2)     | 72(6.3)      | 27(79.4)     | 7(20.6)      | 34(6.0)      |
| Nabilatuk                                                                                                                                                                         | 35(66.0)     | 18(34.0)     | 53(4.6)      | 28(62.2)     | 17(37.8)     | 45(7.9)      |
| Nakapiripirit                                                                                                                                                                     | 49(64.5)     | 27(35.5)     | 76(6.6)      | 13(65.0)     | 7(35.0)      | 20(3.5)      |
| Category of school                                                                                                                                                                |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Government                                                                                                                                                                        | 660(65.0)    | 355(35.0)    | 1015(88.2)   | 203(72.2)    | 78(27.8)     | 281(49.7)    |
| Private                                                                                                                                                                           | 82(60.3)     | 54(39.7)     | 136(11.8)    | 186(65.5)    | 98(34.5)     | 284(50.3)    |
| Note: In the tables for sex, highest level of education, district and category of the school, the parentheses include the row percentages and may not sum to 100 due to rounding. |              |              |              |              |              |              |

**Teaching experience:** Among primary school teachers surveyed, the average teaching experience was 15.1 years, with a range of 1 to 42 years. Male teachers reported slightly more years of experience than their female counterparts. At their current school, participants had taught for an average of 4.7 years, ranging from 1 to 30 years. For secondary school teachers, the average teaching experience was 9.9 years, ranging from 1 to 41 years, with male teachers again reporting slightly more experience than females. At their current school, they had taught for an average of 4.2 years, ranging from 1 to 28 years.

**Highest education level:** Among primary school teachers, the majority (92.4%) had an education level below a bachelor's degree. Most primary school teachers held either a Grade III qualification (37.3%) or a diploma (38.8%) as their highest level of education. In contrast, among secondary school teachers, 45.6% held qualifications below a bachelor's degree. Most secondary school teachers had either a bachelor's degree (50.1%) or a diploma (40.9%) as their highest level of education.

**District:** Over one-third (36.3%) of primary teachers surveyed were from Yumbe District, followed by 28.6% from Terego and 17.6% from Madi-Okollo. In all Karamoja districts, the proportion of participating primary teachers was below 10%. A similar distribution was observed among secondary school teachers: 36.6% were from Yumbe, 28.3% from Terego, and 17.5% from Madi-Okollo.

**Category of school:** Among primary school participants, the majority (88.2%) were from government schools, while 11.8% taught in private schools. In contrast, secondary school teachers were almost evenly split between government (49.7%) and private (50.3%) institutions.

## 3.2 TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND WELL-BEING

**Objective:** *To explore how teachers create, promote, and utilise a supportive teaching environment that enhances their professional growth and well-being.*

Supportive teaching environments are shaped by multiple interrelated factors, with leadership and management being some of the key competences. In this study, the teacher survey assessed leadership and management skills using items related to fostering collaboration, leading discussions, mediating conflict, facilitating trust, modelling positive behaviours, building effective teams, and managing resources responsibly. These dimensions reflect the concrete practices through which teachers cultivate collegiality and promote shared professional growth. In doing so, they not only strengthen interpersonal relationships among colleagues but also enhance the collective capacity to address challenges, maintain motivation, and support student learning. Leadership and management were assessed using nine items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

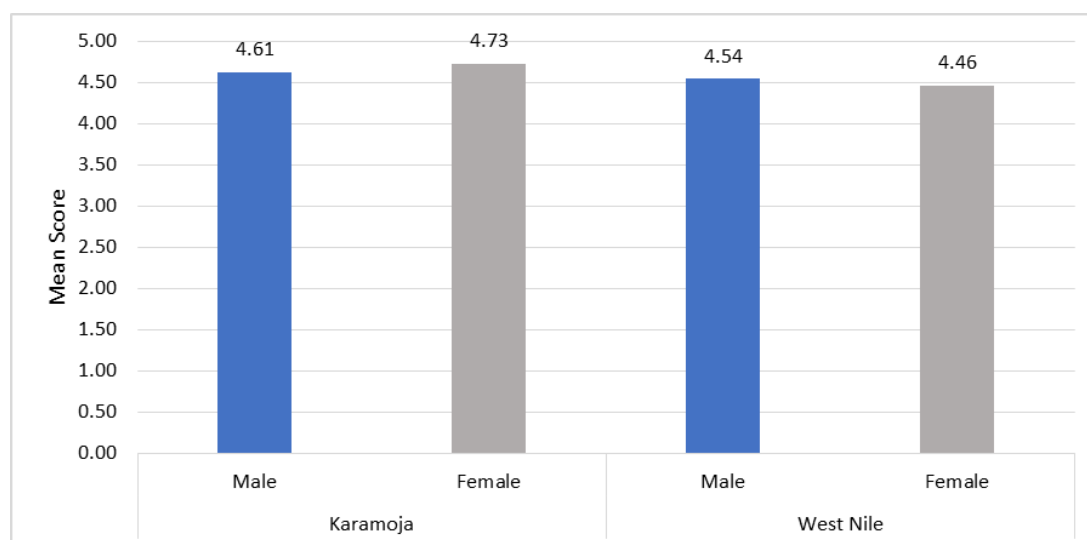
Collaboration is another essential component for fostering a supportive teaching environment, enabling teachers to work together effectively to enhance learning and professional growth. Teachers' collaboration was assessed through five items capturing their promotion of positive working relationships, engagement in professional consultations, coordination of activities, sharing of relevant information, and willingness to undertake supplementary tasks. These practices reflect the different ways teachers build a cooperative culture, strengthen collegial bonds, and enhance the school's collective capacity to address challenges and support student learning. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents' ratings were averaged to generate mean scores, with higher values indicating more positive self-perceptions of leadership and management abilities.

### 3.2.1 Finding at primary school level

#### 3.2.1.1 Leadership and management

Survey findings indicated that primary school teachers rated themselves highly on leadership and management skills, with an overall average score of 4.54 ( $SD = 0.53$ ), ranging from 1.0 to 5.0. Notably, primary teachers in Karamoja ( $M = 4.66$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ) had a significantly higher average score on leadership and management than their counterparts in West Nile ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ),  $t(1148) = 3.56$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, leadership and management scores were consistently high across genders, as illustrated in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1: Primary teachers' mean score on leadership and management by gender**



In Karamoja, female teachers had a slightly higher average score on leadership and management than their male counterparts; however, this difference was not statistically significant at the 5% level,  $t(199) = 1.82, p = .071$ . In contrast, in West Nile, female teachers had a significantly lower average score on leadership and management compared to male teachers,  $t(947) = -2.03, p = .021$ . At the overall level, there were no statistically significant gender differences in the average leadership and management scores among primary school teachers,  $t(1148) = -1.12, p = .261$ .

These findings suggest that teachers perceive themselves as strong leaders and effective managers within their professional environments, reflecting confidence in their ability to foster collaboration, model positive behaviours, and manage resources responsibly—core elements that underpin a supportive teaching environment. These results underscore the role of effective teacher leadership in building collegiality and enhancing the collective ability to sustain motivation and support student learning at the primary level.

Evidence from teachers' FGDs and headteachers' interviews further highlights the pivotal role of leadership and management practices in fostering a supportive teaching environment at the primary level, revealing a strong culture of mentorship, induction, and collegial learning as key strategies used to nurture teacher professional growth. One male headteacher from Terego said,

"We usually have a form of induction. For example, we have community teachers who don't know how to prepare lessons. We attach them to experienced teachers so they can plan together. After developing a lesson plan, they implement it. Once the new teacher can manage, we let them work independently."

This structured mentoring process helps novice teachers gain confidence, refine lesson planning and instructional skills, and gradually assume greater responsibilities, thereby strengthening leadership capacity and professional wellbeing within the school.

Relatedly, teachers are presented with continuous professional development opportunities both within the school through internal workshops and external learning. Several headteachers highlighted the use of inter-school learning and exposure visits as effective mechanisms for teachers' professional development and peer learning. Such practices were seen to broaden teachers' perspectives, expose them to innovative pedagogical practices, and inspire adaptation of successful models within their own schools. A female headteacher from Nabilatuk remarked,

"We carry out capacity building, internally and externally. Teachers go out to see what transpires in other schools, then return and apply. The school supports teachers in their continuous practices by providing scheme books, guiding lesson planning, and facilitating workshops."

In addition, supportive supervision was commonly described by teachers as a positive mechanism for professional growth rather than a punitive measure. This approach was considered to promote reflective practice and reinforced mutual respect between teachers and supervisors, contributing to a nurturing and growth-oriented school culture. One female teacher from Amudat shared during the FGD,

"The school has provided support supervision and monitoring, mostly during the teaching and learning."

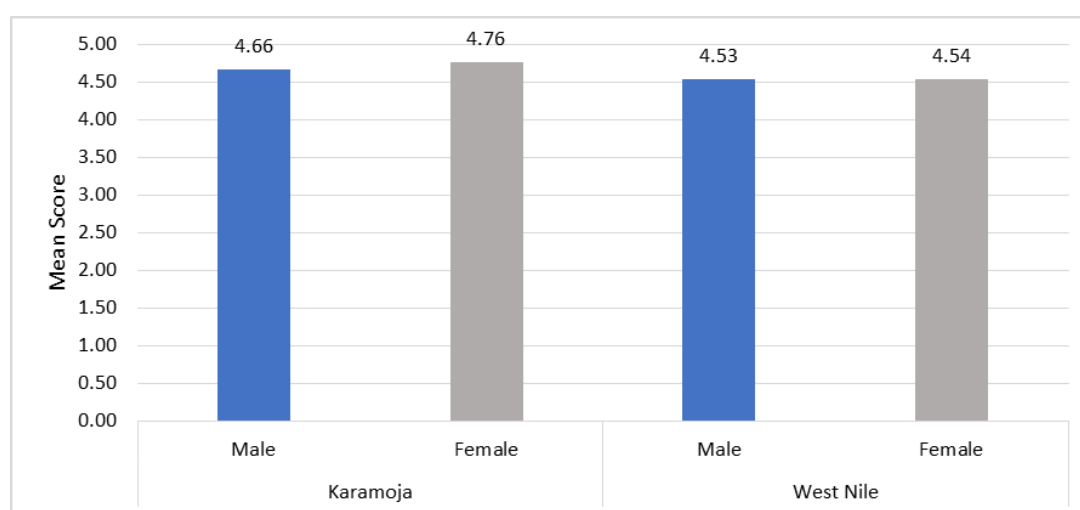
And after the supervision, there is a one-on-one between me [the teacher] and the supervisors on the areas for improvement and the areas of strength to affirm.”

The survey and qualitative findings reveal that teachers’ high self-assessments on leadership skills align with the qualitative evidence showing the prevalence of mentorship, peer collaboration, and supportive supervision. These practices not only enhance teachers’ professional competence but also contribute to their overall well-being and confidence.

### 3.2.1.2 Collaboration and teamwork

Survey findings indicated that primary school teachers rated themselves highly on collaboration skills, with an overall average score of 4.56 ( $SD = 0.59$ ), ranging from 1.4 to 5.0. Notably, primary teachers in Karamoja ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ) had a significantly higher average score on collaboration than their counterparts in West Nile ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ),  $t(1140) = 3.58$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, collaboration scores were consistently high across genders, as illustrated in Figure 2 overleaf:

**Figure 2: Primary teachers’ mean score on collaboration by gender**



Across the two sub-regions, female teachers had slightly higher average scores on collaboration than their male counterparts. However, none of these differences were statistically significant at the 5% level. Moreover, at the overall level, there were no statistically significant gender differences in the average collaboration scores among primary school teachers,  $t(1140) = 0.76$ ,  $p = .447$ .

Overall, while teachers in Karamoja scored significantly higher than those in West Nile, collaboration levels were consistently high across genders, with no statistically significant differences observed between male and female teachers. These findings suggest that, at the primary level, teachers generally engage effectively in collaborative practices, fostering supportive professional relationships and a shared commitment to enhancing student learning.

Complementing these quantitative results, qualitative evidence from teachers’ FGDs further underscores collaboration as a critical component of supportive teaching environments. Teachers repeatedly highlighted teamwork practices such as peer mentoring, joint planning and preparation, and sharing of ideas and educational materials as fundamental to their professional growth and to strengthening collegial bonds within schools. A female teacher from Nakapiripirit explained: “In our school, we interact openly with one another and freely share ideas. Some of the ideas that have been shared by colleagues, and sometimes by the administration, have helped me in various ways.” This spirit of openness and mutual support reflects a collaborative culture that not only enhances teachers’ instructional capacity but also reinforces collective efficacy and well-being, key attributes of a sustainable and supportive teaching environment.

### 3.2.1.3 School-wide interventions toward a supportive environment

Headteachers across the study districts described a range of strategies through which schools seek to cultivate supportive teaching environments that enhance teachers’ professional growth and well-being. Their accounts revealed a multidimensional approach encompassing economic support, welfare provision, psychosocial care,

and opportunities for professional development.

Economically, several headteachers highlighted structured and informal mechanisms aimed at easing teachers' financial vulnerability. In Amudat, one male headteacher noted that the school had recently introduced a savings association to encourage a culture of financial planning and provide a buffer against emergencies. Although still in its early stages, the initiative was framed as a way of reducing anxiety about unforeseen crises and fostering collective responsibility among staff. In other schools, economic support took the form of small allowances or tokens tied to specific responsibilities. For instance, teachers received facilitation modest PTA allowances for participating in school activities, end-of-term assessment monitoring, or undertaking duties beyond their classroom schedules. Additionally, where policy constraints limited the charging of fees, as noted by a male headteacher in Nabilatuk, teachers largely relied on their salaries, prompting encouragement for engagement in supplementary income-generating activities such as small-scale agriculture. One male Headteacher in Madi-Okollo remarked,

"We encourage them [teachers] to do other income-generating activities at a convenient time to supplement their salary."

Welfare provision emerged as a central pillar of support. Multiple headteachers reported providing regular meals at school, with a practical and motivational rationale: teachers who are well-fed and physically satisfied were perceived as more emotionally stable and better positioned to teach effectively. One headteacher in Terego said: "When someone is hungry, they may not be in the right mood to teach. But when they are satisfied, they feel happy, and activities run smoothly." Across both subregions, teachers were allocated access to school gardens or plots of land to grow crops for personal consumption, thereby supplementing their livelihoods and enhancing food security. Housing support was also significant, especially in West Nile. In Terego, teachers were accommodated in school-managed houses to reduce the burden and cost of daily travel, with renovations undertaken where necessary to ensure habitable conditions.

In a few schools, health-related support extended beyond nutrition. In Nabilatuk, one headteacher remarked that a school-based clinic provided first aid and basic medication, with referrals made for more serious conditions. Some headteachers described financial contributions, both individual and institutional, towards teachers who experienced bereavement, reflecting a communal approach to hardship. These forms of assistance were consistently framed as integral to maintaining morale and enabling teachers to remain focused on their professional responsibilities.

Psychosocial support was another prominent theme. Headteachers in most schools described structured guidance and counselling mechanisms, including designated personnel such as senior women and men teachers and committees. In some cases, external support such as district-level educational officers responsible for counselling and NGOs, were reported to provide this support. Headteachers emphasised that such systems were intended to address both personal and professional challenges, highlighting their acknowledgement that teachers' emotional stability directly affects their classroom performance. Social cohesion was further promoted through encouraging harmonious relationships among staff, learners, administrators, and the wider community. Recreational activities, such as organised football games during free time, were also mentioned as avenues for relieving stress and strengthening collegial bonds.

Professional growth was supported through both internal and external capacity-building initiatives. Schools reported organising continuous professional development sessions and workshops at the school level. In Yumbe, one male headteacher described collaboration with NGOs that provided training on specific themes such as violence prevention. Career guidance was also offered, particularly in response to national teacher policy directive requiring teachers to upgrade qualifications to degree level by 2030. By encouraging further study and facilitating access to training opportunities, school leaders positioned themselves as active agents in promoting teachers' long-term professional advancement.

#### **3.2.1.4 Gaps in relation to creating a supportive environment**

Although the findings identify multiple strategies intended to create supportive teaching environments—including mentorship, peer collaboration, supportive supervision, inter-school learning, savings schemes, welfare provision, counselling structures, housing support, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshops and modest financial incentives—the depth and institutionalisation of these mechanisms varied considerably across schools in both subregions. This suggests that while support for teacher well-being was visible and often

tangible, structured systems explicitly oriented toward sustained professional growth were less consistently embedded.

Structured and growth-oriented professional development mechanisms were not uniformly evident across the two subregions. Although some headteachers reported organising Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions, internal workshops, and capacity-building activities, these accounts were often leadership-driven and not consistently corroborated by teachers in FGDs. In most schools, professional development was unsystematic, lacking clearly articulated plans, progression pathways, and mechanisms for tracking instructional improvement. Where induction systems or mentoring arrangements were described, teachers more frequently emphasised general collegial support such as informally “helping one another” rather than structured mentoring cycles, subject-based coaching, or formalised feedback systems. This pattern suggests that professional learning structures may depend heavily on individual headteacher initiative rather than being embedded within a coherent, school-wide framework.

Much of what was described as a supportive environment was anchored in welfare-oriented and relational forms of support. While these elements contribute positively to teacher well-being, they were not consistently linked to deliberate instructional improvement or sustained professional advancement. Evidence of structured continuous professional development plans, subject-specific pedagogical strengthening, systematic classroom observation, or monitoring of instructional growth was limited across both subregions. Professional growth was often framed in general terms—such as encouraging teachers to upgrade their qualifications—rather than as the ongoing refinement of classroom practice.

The distribution of supportive practices appeared was highly contingent on leadership capacity and the stability of external partnerships. In some cases, initiatives such as SACCOs, welfare-based financial mechanisms, counselling services, or continuous professional development programmes were not institutionally anchored but were closely tied to specific individuals or external partner support. As one male headteacher in Madi-Okollo explained,

“The welfare support to teachers is dwindling because our partners used to help us. Right now, they’re not giving us anything. Last year, we had a SACCO, but this year it has not functioned... one of the prominent leaders was transferred. I think that is why it collapsed.”

This account illustrates how some support structures were vulnerable to leadership turnover and the withdrawal of external actors. Rather than being embedded within durable governance or policy frameworks, certain initiatives appeared personality-driven or donor-dependent.

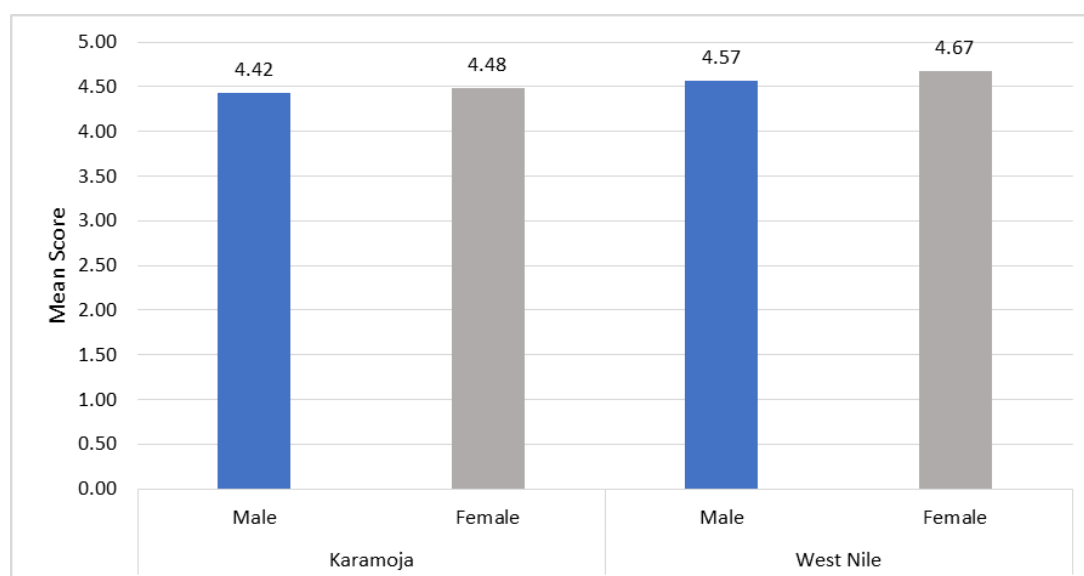
Overall, the findings indicate that supportive teaching environments at the primary level strongly prioritise welfare provision, social solidarity, and crisis responsiveness. These elements are contextually responsive and valued. However, structured professional development systems, sustained instructional improvement mechanisms, teacher-led leadership processes, and durable institutional frameworks remain unevenly embedded. The result is a supportive climate that effectively promotes well-being and collegiality but only partially institutionalises the conditions necessary for systematic and sustained professional growth.

### **3.2.2 Findings at secondary school level**

#### **3.2.2.1 Leadership and management**

Survey results also indicated that secondary school teachers rated themselves highly on leadership and management skills, with an overall average score of 4.57 ( $SD = 0.55$ ), ranging from 1.8 to 5.0. However, secondary teachers in Karamoja ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ) had a significantly lower average score compared to secondary teachers in West Nile ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ),  $t(559) = -2.56$ ,  $p = .005$ . Leadership and management scores among secondary teachers were consistently high across genders, as shown in Figure 3 below:

**Figure 3: Secondary teachers' mean score on leadership and management by gender**



In Karamoja, female secondary teachers had a slightly higher average score on leadership and management than male teachers, though the difference was not statistically significant,  $t(96) = 0.46$ ,  $p = .657$ . Conversely, in West Nile, female teachers had significantly higher average scores on leadership and management than their male counterparts,  $t(461) = 2.00$ ,  $p = .023$ . At the overall level, female secondary teachers ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ) scored significantly higher than male secondary teachers ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ),  $t(559) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .025$ .

At the secondary level, the high levels of leadership and management skills reaffirm the presence of strong professional practices that foster collaboration, trust, and team-building within schools. The notably higher scores among West Nile teachers, however, point to potential regional disparities in support systems or professional development opportunities that may influence leadership effectiveness.

Gender-based comparisons reveal another important trend: female secondary teachers consistently outperformed their male counterparts, particularly in West Nile and overall. This suggests that women educators at this level may play a particularly strong role in shaping collegial, supportive, and professionally enriching school environments.

Insights from teachers, headteachers, and district officials further illustrate how educators cultivate and sustain such supportive professional spaces. Their reflections emphasised structured professional development, peer learning, and mentorship as key avenues for strengthening teacher capacity and sustaining motivation. Headteachers described supervision and mentorship as essential mechanisms for improving classroom practice and accountability. Importantly, supervision was viewed not as punitive, but as developmental—a process aimed at growth and improvement. A male headteacher from Madi-Okollo explained,

“We have support supervision where administrators and heads of departments go in to supervise delivery in class and on duty. And this supervision is not to fault-find; it is to support improvement, to support proper service delivery.”

This approach reflects a collegial model that encourages dialogue, reflection, and shared responsibility for enhancing teaching quality. Teachers who experienced such supervision reported feeling valued and supported, which in turn boosted their confidence and professional well-being. Teachers also underscored continuous professional development as vital for collaboration and lifelong learning. They viewed professional growth as an ongoing journey of engagement, peer interaction, and openness to new ideas. A male teacher from Yumbe noted the need for “continuous learning to remain relevant to the needs of the profession,” while another male teacher from Amudat explained,

“We have remained students throughout our life. We learn and unlearn some things—we learn new ideas and let go of outdated ones. We are bound to changes. We also co-share knowledge. I learn from another teacher, and that teacher learns from me. For example, we sit together to develop departmental notes for teaching. We also practise team teaching—one person can observe another teaching and where necessary, offer feedback. That’s how we grow.”

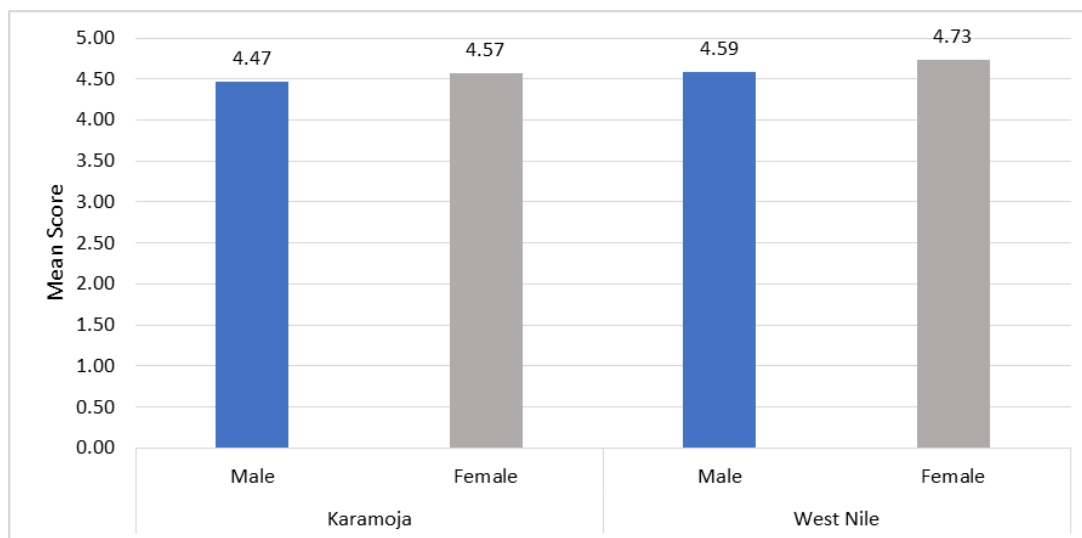
These reflections highlight a professional culture rooted in lifelong learning, where teachers evolve alongside curriculum changes and emerging learner needs. Practices such as team teaching, peer observation, and joint lesson preparation foster collective improvement, mutual accountability, and collegial trust. This culture of open exchange not only enhances teaching quality but also supports teachers’ emotional well-being.

Education leaders reinforced the importance of such ongoing learning. The DEO of Amudat district explained that periodic capacity-building workshops are organized to strengthen teachers’ competencies and promote the exchange of ideas. These gatherings serve as spaces for collective reflection, skill-sharing, and motivation—cultivating a sense of professional community that extends beyond individual schools.

### 3.2.2.2 Collaboration and teamwork

Survey results also indicated that secondary school teachers rated themselves highly on collaboration skills, with an overall average score of 4.61 ( $SD = 0.58$ ), ranging from 1.0 to 5.0. However, secondary teachers in Karamoja ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ) had a significantly lower average score compared to secondary teachers in West Nile ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ),  $t(558) = -2.05$ ,  $p = .020$ . Additionally, collaboration scores among secondary teachers were consistently high across genders, as shown in Figure 4 below:

**Figure 4: Secondary teachers’ mean score on collaboration by gender**



In Karamoja, female secondary teachers had a slightly higher average score on collaboration than male teachers, though the difference was not statistically significant at the 5% level,  $t(96) = 0.81$ ,  $p = .421$ . Conversely, in West Nile, female teachers had significantly higher average scores on collaboration than their male counterparts,  $t(460) = 2.58$ ,  $p = .005$ . At the overall level, female secondary teachers ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) had significantly higher average collaboration scores than male secondary teachers ( $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ),  $t(558) = 2.66$ ,  $p = .004$ .

Overall, while regional differences were observed, with teachers in one subregion demonstrating slightly stronger collaborative practices than those in another, collaboration remained consistently strong across genders. Notably, female secondary teachers tended to report higher collaboration skills than their male counterparts, particularly at the overall level. These results indicate that secondary teachers generally engage effectively in collaborative practices, supporting collegiality and contributing to a shared commitment to student learning.

These results were reinforced by teachers’ reflections through FGDs, which further illuminate how collaboration manifests in daily school life and contributes to both professional growth and teacher well-being. Collaboration was closely tied to professional development, as teachers described joint lesson planning, team-based prob-

lem-solving, sharing resources, coordinating professional activities, and mentoring as central practices that promote collective responsibility and a sense of shared purpose. Teachers' reflections illustrated that collaboration extended beyond professional cooperation to include emotional and social support. As one male teacher from Nabilatuk explained,

"Whenever we face challenges or issues at school, we usually come together to support one another. The person experiencing a problem is guided through it, and this collective support helps to restore emotional stability. The school is always there for us during difficult times, and that really helps to strengthen our well-being."

This perspective highlights how collegial collaboration operates as an informal psychosocial support system, where peers and school leaders actively help one another navigate challenges—both professional and personal. Such support was seen as vital in maintaining motivation, confidence, and emotional balance among teachers. Collaboration also fostered interpersonal growth, enhancing communication and social skills that extend beyond the school environment. As one male teacher from Amudat district noted,

"I've learned a lot about communication skills—how to interact and socialise with others in positive ways. This has given me valuable knowledge about how to live and relate well within the community and society."

Some teachers further described social interactions, such as end-of-term gatherings, as important for strengthening collegial ties and promoting well-being. These social activities, though informal, were recognised as essential in maintaining morale and reinforcing a sense of belonging within the school community.

Professional collaboration was also viewed as an ongoing learning process that involved peer consultation and shared reflection. One female teacher from Amudat observed that, "Teachers in our school support each other—both professionally and socially. We share knowledge, consult colleagues, and learn from one another. Emotionally, too, teachers and administrators are very friendly and supportive, making the school a comfortable place to work" (Female teacher, Amudat). This reflection underscores the interdependence between professional and emotional support, showing how collaboration nurtures both competence and care within the school environment.

Subject-specific teamwork also featured in a few discussions, particularly in addressing curriculum-related challenges. A male teacher from Madi-Okollo explained how he relied on peer input to refine assessment practices,

"Sometimes I find it challenging to develop scenario-based questions. Even now, some of us, myself included, still struggle with aspects of the curriculum. What I usually do is, after drafting a scenario, I consult my colleagues especially those in my subject area to check whether it aligns with what I intend to assess. I also pay attention to language, because if a scenario is phrased incorrectly, learners might misunderstand and respond in the wrong way. At times, I even involve language teachers to review the wording or tenses to ensure the questions are clear and easy for learners to understand."

This example highlights how collaboration enhances instructional quality and reflective practice by fostering shared accountability, continuous learning, and professional growth. It also demonstrates the confidence and professional strength of teachers who are willing to engage in honest self-reflection and critically examine their own practice. Overall, the teachers' accounts demonstrate that collaboration operates on multiple levels—professional, social, and emotional—creating supportive environments that sustain both teacher effectiveness and well-being.

### **3.2.2.3 School-wide interventions toward a supportive environment**

At the institutional level, teacher well-being—particularly in its emotional and economic dimensions—emerged as a central pillar of what schools described as a supportive teaching environment. Across interviews with head-teachers and FGDs with teachers, there was consistent emphasis on structures and practices intended to safeguard teachers' emotional stability, social security, and financial resilience. These accounts were not isolated; rather, they were echoed across all study sites, suggesting that welfare-oriented support has become embedded

within the institutional culture of many schools.

Emotional support was frequently articulated through the presence of guidance and counselling structures that extend beyond learners to include staff. In several schools, career guidance teachers, senior man and senior woman teachers, or designated counsellors were described as accessible points of contact for teachers experiencing personal or professional challenges.

In Amudat district, for example, a female headteacher explained that career guidance personnel “not only handle the students but also the staff when they have issues,” highlighting the dual function of these roles. Similarly, another respondent from the same district noted the presence of a standby counsellor who remains within reach to provide emotional support whenever needed.

In Nabilatuk and Terego districts, headteachers described one-on-one engagements, advisory sessions, and periodic conversations about emotional well-being as routine practices within the school environment. Even bereavement was explicitly mentioned as an area where schools intervene, with counselling and collective support offered to affected teachers.

These narratives suggest that schools are intentionally cultivating emotionally responsive environments in which teachers are not left to navigate distress in isolation. The institutionalisation of counselling roles, whether through internal staff or external organisations invited to provide guidance, reflects a recognition that teachers’ emotional states directly influence their professional functioning. Moreover, the emphasis on shared experiences and open conversations about emotions points to an effort to normalise vulnerability within the professional space, thereby strengthening social cohesion.

Economic support was similarly foregrounded as a key dimension of well-being. Although respondents acknowledged resource constraints, schools described deliberate attempts to supplement teachers’ income and provide financial safety nets. In Amudat, a female headteacher outlined the operation of a school-based SACCO through which teachers make monthly contributions that can be accessed during times of need. The SACCO functions not merely as a savings mechanism but as a structured system of mutual aid governed by agreed guidelines. Similar accounts, though not present in all schools, were echoed by teachers and headteachers across other districts. Such arrangements indicate an institutional commitment to collective financial resilience, reinforcing solidarity among staff.

In addition to savings schemes, in some schools, modest allowances such as PTA and responsibility allowances are paid alongside regular salaries. While these payments were described as “meagre” and constrained by limited resource envelopes, headteachers emphasised the importance of paying them promptly as a gesture of appreciation and recognition. In a few schools, teachers also received occasional food handouts at the end of the term, reflecting efforts to cushion economic pressures in practical ways.

These findings reveal that at the institutional level, supportive teaching environments are strongly anchored in welfare-based interventions that address emotional and economic vulnerability. Schools appear to recognise that professional growth cannot occur in isolation from basic well-being. By providing counselling, fostering advisory relationships, organising collective savings mechanisms, and offering supplementary allowances, they seek to stabilise teachers’ personal circumstances so that they can function effectively in their professional roles.

#### **3.2.2.4 Gaps in relation to creating a supportive environment**

Although the findings portray schools as empathetic and socially cohesive institutions, a more layered interpretation reveals an imbalance in how support is conceptualised and operationalised. Across sites, institutional commitment to teachers’ emotional and economic stability is evident. Counselling structures, advisory roles, modest allowances, and practical welfare provisions collectively signal a recognition that teachers require social security and psychological reassurance to function effectively. In contexts marked by financial precarity and demanding working conditions, such measures are substantive rather than symbolic; they contribute meaningfully to morale, retention, and a sense of belonging.

However, when examined against the objective of enhancing professional growth alongside well-being, the evidence suggests that the architecture of support is more welfare-oriented than professionally developmental. The environment appears to stabilise teachers’ personal circumstances, yet less systematically cultivates their instructional expertise. While collegial exchanges, mentorship, and supervision are mentioned positively, the mechanisms underlying them remain under-specified. Supervision, for instance, is framed as supportive rather than fault-finding, but there was a clear lack of structured continuous professional development, documented

feedback cycles, or institutionalised mentorship and coaching processes that translate into measurable pedagogical improvement. Without such scaffolding, developmental supervision risks being relationally affirming but technically shallow.

Similarly, teachers highlighted continuous learning and peer collaboration, yet the structural conditions enabling sustained professional learning were not fully articulated. There was little reference to protected time for collaboration, resource allocation for training, subject-based learning communities, or institutionalised professional development plans. In the absence of these elements, professional growth may depend heavily on individual initiative and interpersonal goodwill. Lifelong learning, while valued rhetorically, may therefore remain aspirational if systemic constraints such as workload pressures, large classes, or limited instructional materials are not concurrently addressed.

The largely informal character of many support systems also raises questions about durability. Emotional support often depends on the presence of a caring headteacher or a staff member trained in counselling. Financial assistance is contingent upon available resources and discretionary budgeting. Where such leadership is absent or resource envelopes shrink, continuity may be jeopardised. For example, a male headteacher from Nakapiripirit noted that, “When it comes to mental or emotional support, we don’t really play a significant role. Some teachers have personal issues and challenges that they bring to us, expecting help, even when we are unable to support.” This further illustrates the unevenness that can emerge when institutional backing is thin.

In such instances, even reactive interventions become constrained, exposing the fragility of welfare-based systems that lack formal policy anchoring. Moreover, much of the psychosocial support described appears reactive—mobilised when teachers face bereavement, distress, or misconduct—rather than embedded within preventive well-being strategies, as observed in a reflection by a female Headteacher in Amudat district,

“As administrators, we step in when someone has a challenge and call the person in for support. Personally, since I am also a trained counsellor, I usually invite the individual to speak with me when I notice they are facing a difficult issue and are struggling to cope. I then guide them through the situation and try to help them work through the problem.”

While responsive care is commendable, preventive frameworks such as structured reflective spaces, workload audits, or systematic stress management initiatives are less operationalised. A similar pattern surfaces in instructional domains where challenges trigger consultation or advice, but there is limited indication of proactive, data-informed instructional improvement cycles designed to elevate practice across the board.

### 3.3 CHILD PROTECTION, WELLBEING AND INCLUSION

***Objective: To establish school and community practices that enhance child protection, wellbeing, and inclusion.***

Teachers’ ability to build positive, respectful, and collaborative relationships with learners, parents and community members is central to creating school and community environments that enhance child protection, wellbeing, and inclusion. In this study, the teacher survey assessed skills for effective community relations through items that examined teachers’ ability to treat parents with respect and fairness, encourage parental participation in children’s learning, communicate learners’ progress clearly, listen and respond appropriately to parents’ expectations, collaborate with diverse stakeholders to support children’s development, promote meaningful community participation in school activities, and motivate learners to engage in community activities. These items represented the practical approaches through which teachers build trust, strengthen partnerships, and foster inclusive participation.

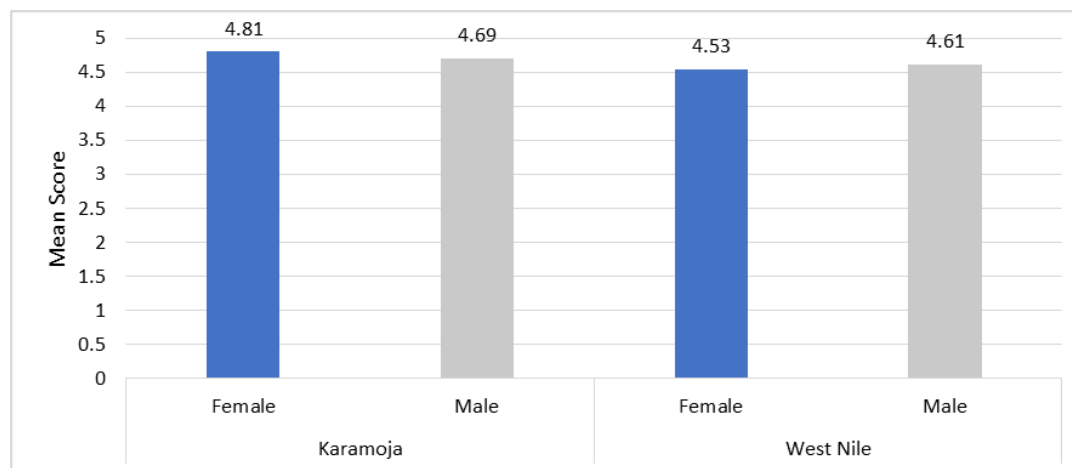
By exercising these skills, teachers not only enhance communication and collaboration between schools and communities but also contributed to creating safe, supportive, and inclusive environments that uphold children’s rights and promote their holistic wellbeing. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents’ ratings were averaged to generate mean scores, with higher values indicating more positive self-perceptions of effective community relations.

Evidence for this objective drew on both the teacher survey and qualitative data from teachers’ focus group discussions and headteachers’ interviews, which provided deeper insights into how these practices worked in daily school and community life.

### 3.3.1 Findings at primary school level

The findings from the survey revealed that primary school teachers rated themselves highly on effective community relations with an overall average score of ( $M=4.61$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ), ranging from 1.3 to 5.0. Specifically, primary teachers in Karamoja ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ) reported significantly higher mean scores on community relation skills compared to their counterparts in West Nile ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ),  $t(1142) = 3.70$ ,  $p < .001$ . Across genders, both male and female teachers demonstrated consistently high community relations scores, as shown in Figure 5 below:

**Figure 5: Primary teachers' mean score on effective community relations by gender**



In Karamoja, female primary school teachers had a slightly higher average score on effective community relations than their male counterparts; however, this difference was not statistically significant at the 5% level,  $t(199) = 1.90$ ,  $p = .059$ . In contrast, in West Nile, female teachers scored significantly lower than male teachers on effective community relations,  $t(941) = -2.05$ ,  $p = .020$ . At the overall primary level, school teachers' scores on effective community relations were slightly higher for males ( $M = 4.62$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ) than for females ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ); however, this difference was not statistically significant,  $t(1142) = -1.09$ ,  $p = .274$ .

The findings suggest that primary school teachers generally perceive themselves as competent in fostering effective community relations, demonstrating the ability to engage parents, encourage learner participation, and collaborate with stakeholders to support learning. The higher scores observed among teachers in Karamoja indicate that local or regional practices may enhance school–community interactions, potentially through stronger networks, supportive leadership, or active parental involvement. Although some gender differences were observed at the regional level, the absence of significant differences overall suggests that male and female teachers are equally capable of promoting inclusive participation and facilitating communication with the community. Overall, these results underscore the important role of teachers in cultivating school–community partnerships that contribute to children's learning and well-being.

Qualitative insights from teachers' FGDs and interviews with headteachers and PTA representatives aligned with the survey results, showing that most primary schools had well-established child protection structures, though implementation varied in consistency. In Karamoja, formal structures such as Child Protection Committees, disciplinary committees, and guidance and counselling departments were widely reported. One headteacher in Nakapiripirit shared, "We have a child protection committee, whose role is to ensure that every child is safe. We also have peer support groups where children can share their issues." Similarly, a teacher in Amudat district emphasised referral procedures,

"In cases of physical violence or health issues, we always refer them to health clinics like Health Center III for medication... then later we involve the parents and local leaders, who sit with them to devise a plan."

In West Nile, parental participation featured prominently in child protection practices. A male headteacher in Terego explained,

"When there is an issue, we call the parents' representatives and the School Management Committee to present it. If it requires all parents, we agree together to call a general meeting to explain and handle the situation."

In practice, such broader meetings were typically held for concerns affecting the wider school community such as learner safety, welfare challenges, or resource constraints that could impact the quality of supervision and care rather than for confidential individual cases. This collective approach strengthened shared responsibility for children's wellbeing, and promoted inclusive decision-making around issues affecting learners.

Across both subregions, schools collaborate with local authorities to address child protection concerns. The reflections from teachers were most times consistent with those of headteachers reflecting a shared awareness among members in the school on the available protection, handling, mitigation, and redress measures to ensure child safety and within the schools. During an FGD in Madi Okollo, a female teacher described the link between school and community efforts: "We liaise with the local council leaders (LC1), the community task force, and also counsel parents." Likewise, in Nakapiripirit, a male teacher explained,

"Whenever there is a serious case, we work closely with the local council and the police. They help us ensure that the child is safe and that the family receives counselling and guidance on how to handle the situation."

Promoting learner wellbeing was central to school–community efforts across both subregions. In Karamoja, some schools provided routine health screenings, hygiene sensitisation, and guidance services. One headteacher in Amudat noted, "We have a health unit whereby each child is screened every term. We also have guidance and counselling, which runs on a daily basis for all learners," underscoring a structured approach to supporting children's health and psychosocial needs. In West Nile, wellbeing initiatives often drew on parental and community support. As a female teacher in Madi-Okollo noted,

"Parents contribute food and scholastic materials, and they also help maintain school facilities, while we organize learners for hygiene campaigns and community activities", emphasizing the collaborative role of the community in sustaining learners' wellbeing."

Gender-sensitive mentoring was also prominent in most Karamoja schools, reinforcing girls' participation and menstrual hygiene management. These efforts aimed to ensure that girls continued their education cycle without being affected by the natural processes as one female teacher in Nabilatuk said,

"In gender-related issues, we have key health mentors among the boys. Their work is to give key messages on menstrual hygiene and management. They also encourage girls to stay in class even when they're on their menstrual periods... we now have an equal ratio of girls and boys entering classes."

In contrast, such practices were less frequently reported by West Nile participants. Moreover, in Karamoja, child rights clubs played a key role in promoting inclusive practices, as one Headteacher in Nabilatuk noted,

"Through our child rights clubs, learners get to understand their rights and responsibilities, which helps them participate fully and respect others in school."

Across all the study districts, teachers emphasised ensuring equal participation of learners—boys, girls, and those with disabilities. This commitment was reflected in efforts to engage every learner during lessons, provide equal opportunities to respond to questions, and involve learners in designing and using learning materials as one female teacher in Yumbe explained,

"We pick hands from all the corners, involve girls and boys, and include learners with disabilities. When producing learning aids, you can employ a girl to be a doctor or an engineer." This reflection illustrates teachers' attempts to challenge traditional barriers and transform gender norms around roles and representation."

Classroom observations validated these accounts, showing that many teachers demonstrated deliberate and thoughtful practices to promote gender equality in participation. A recurring pattern was the intentional selection of both boys and girls to take part in lesson activities, with several observations noting balanced questioning and equitable turn-taking. Such practices indicate a conscious effort by teachers to manage participation fairly. A few teachers went further by deliberately forming mixed-gender groups and ensuring that leadership roles and task responsibilities were distributed equitably, reinforcing collaborative and inclusive learning dynamics. Notably, related patterns and levels of teachers' gender-equitable practices in learners' classroom participation were observed across both subregions.

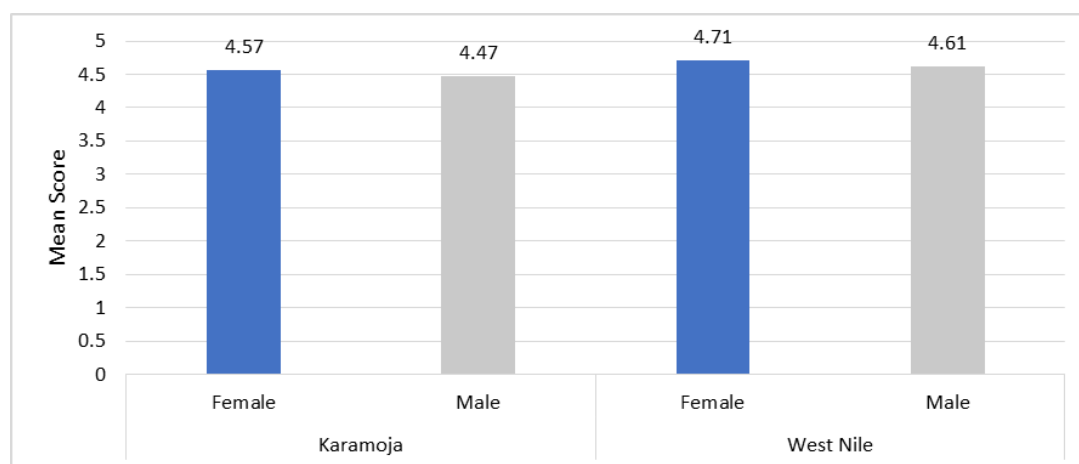
Despite these positive practices, some gaps remained. Gender equality in participation was not consistently applied across classrooms. While many teachers consciously sought to balance boys' and girls' engagement, others reflected uneven practices, limited awareness of gender dynamics, or missed opportunities for gender-transformative teaching. In some cases, teachers unintentionally gave more attention to one gender—sometimes girls,

other times boys. Though often well-intentioned, such imbalances risked alienating certain learners and framing gender equality as preferential treatment rather than inclusive practice.

### 3.3.1.2 Findings at secondary school level

The survey findings indicated that secondary school teachers rated themselves highly effective community relations, with an overall average score of ( $M=4.62$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ), ranging from 1.6 to 5.0. Secondary teachers in West Nile ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ) reported significantly higher mean scores on community relation skills compared to their counterparts in Karamoja ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ),  $t(560) = -2.37$ ,  $p = .009$ . Consistent with the primary level findings, mean scores among secondary teachers were generally high across genders in Figure 6 below:

**Figure 6: Secondary teachers' mean score on effective community relations by gender**



In Karamoja, female secondary school teachers reported a slightly higher mean score on effective community relations compared to their male counterparts; however, this difference was not statistically significant,  $t(97) = 0.72$ ,  $p = .472$ . Similarly, in West Nile, female teachers scored slightly higher than male teachers, though not statistically different at the 5% level,  $t(461) = 1.89$ ,  $p = .060$ . At the overall secondary level, school teachers' scores were slightly higher for females ( $M = 4.69$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) than for males ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ). This difference was statistically significant,  $t(560) = 1.99$ ,  $p = .024$ .

At the secondary level, the generally high scores on effective community relations indicate that teachers possess strong social skills that facilitate collaboration with parents, learners, and the broader school community. The significantly higher mean scores in West Nile suggest potential regional differences, such as more established school–community partnerships or localized support mechanisms that may strengthen teachers' ability to engage effectively. Gender comparisons indicate that female teachers reported slightly higher scores than their male counterparts across the secondary level. This pattern suggests that female secondary teachers may contribute strongly to fostering inclusive communication, encouraging parental participation, and promoting community engagement in school activities. Overall, the findings imply that effective community relations are a shared strength across genders, with contextual factors potentially shaping regional variations in these skills.

Qualitative insights from IDIs, FGDs, and PTA interviews closely aligned with the survey findings, indicating that secondary schools across Karamoja and West Nile implement a range of strategies to promote child protection, learner wellbeing, and inclusion. However, the extent and consistency of implementation vary between and within the two subregions.

In Karamoja, most participants highlighted the presence of formal mechanisms designed to ensure inclusivity, protection, and wellbeing of learners such as bursary schemes for displaced or orphaned students as one male Headteacher from Nabilatuk explained,

“We engage such learners through provision of bursaries, like for those who are displaced or have lost their beloved ones. We have around nine to twelve who are sponsored in that way. Then, if there is harassment, we use the law...we are advised to follow the law.”

Similarly, guidance and counselling were commonly combined with collaboration with community structures for referral to local authorities. A male teacher in Amudat described how schools work with local governance systems to handle serious cases,

“Whenever there is a serious case, we work closely with the local council and the police. They help us ensure that the child is safe and that the family receives counselling and guidance.”

In West Nile, comparable practices were observed, alongside structured engagement with parents and guardians to promote learners’ safety and holistic wellbeing. As one female teacher in Yumbe explained: “We liaise with the parents or the guardians of these children... we write letters to invite the parents, sit together and guide and counsel the child together with the parent.”

Across both sub-regions, participants emphasised promoting learners’ physical and psychosocial wellbeing through a variety of initiatives. In Nakapiririt, for example, teachers mentioned structured mentorship and guidance programs, including family days, which foster a sense of belonging among students. A male teacher described the practice,

“We created families and we have particular family days where teachers, non-teaching staff, and students sit in particular families to discuss the good and the bad of themselves. This theme brings in collective responsibility of the learners, the teachers and everyone.”

While such initiatives promote a strong sense of belonging and collective responsibility, they also highlight the need for well-trained and sensitive teachers. Structured mentorship and family-based activities involve close interactions with learners, which can pose risks if not carefully managed. Ensuring that teachers are adequately trained in child protection, psychosocial support, and ethical facilitation is therefore essential to safeguard students while fostering an inclusive and supportive school environment.

Co-curricular programs such as peace clubs, debate clubs, and sports were also reported as vital platforms for enhancing learners’ social and emotional wellbeing. A male teacher from Terego noted: “We have various school programs—guidance and counselling, peace clubs, debate clubs. All these are geared to ensure that learners are shaped better.”

Attention to learners’ emotional needs, particularly among refugee students, was a recurrent theme in all West Nile study districts. Teachers described the importance of being responsive and empathetic to students’ psychological states. As a female teacher from Madi-Okollo shared,

“Many times, they have emotional discomfort that we see in class. We make sure we don’t become so rigid as to disfavour them from attending classes because they are not at par with the rest.”

At the classroom level, teachers reported using collaborative group work to integrate shy or struggling learners and encourage participation. A female teacher in Amudat explained,

“We encourage collaborative learning, like putting those particularly shy students in groups of the quick learners. They can adapt and try to be free other than being lonely and feeling out of place.”

Teachers also emphasised efforts to identify and support learners with special education needs through adaptive instructional practices. A male teacher from Terego elaborated,

“All our learners have special needs. We identify them by observing responses in class. If a student cannot hear instructions, we try different ways to communicate and ask questions to confirm. Similarly, for visually impaired students, we check if they can see what is written on the board.”

Gender inclusion was another area of focus at both the classroom and school-wide levels. Teachers described ensuring that boys and girls participated equally in lessons, accessed learning resources, and engaged in extracurricular activities. As one male headteacher in Nakapiririt reflected,

“We have activities like sports for boys and girls. We include both genders to promote gender sensitivity.”

Classroom observations corroborated these reflections on gender equity, though practices were not always uniform across classrooms, schools, and subregions. While many teachers made conscious efforts to engage both boys and girls, others demonstrated inconsistent approaches or limited awareness of gender dynamics, leading in some cases to unintentional bias. Variations were especially noticeable in teacher–learner interactions, where participation was not always balanced in some classrooms, and in the provision of emotional and psychosocial support, which was more pronounced in refugee-hosting contexts. This unevenness may reflect differences in

teachers' training and exposure to continuous professional development, as well as structural constraints such as large class sizes that limit the consistent use of intentional participation strategies.

### 3.4 PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

**Objective: To assess teachers' practices on classroom management, instruction and assessment.**

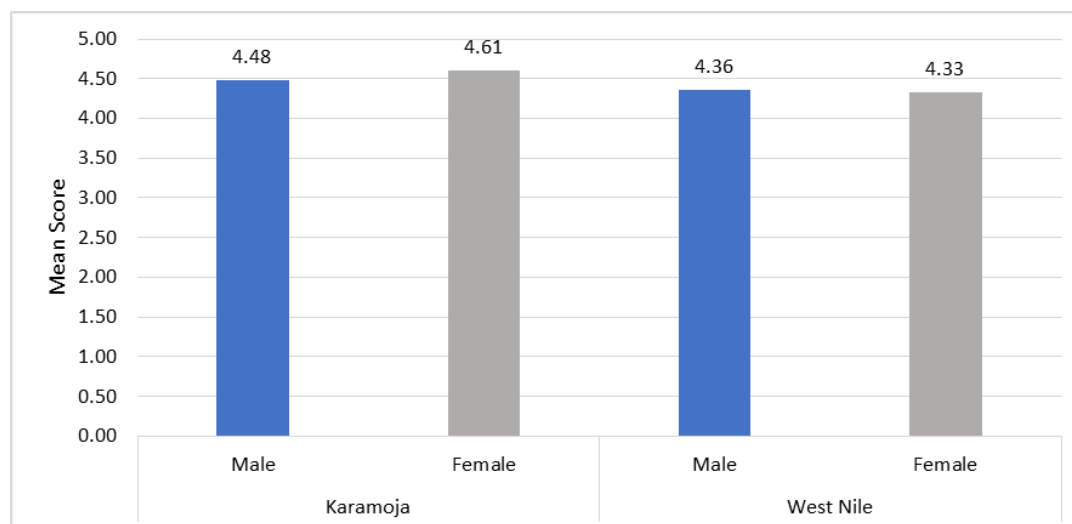
Pedagogical practices are central to effective teaching, encompassing classroom management, instructional delivery, and learner assessment. In this study, these practices were examined through a combination of surveys, classroom observations, and teachers' focus group discussions. Classroom observations and focus group discussions with teachers complemented the survey by providing deeper insights into how these practices are enacted in real classroom settings and how teachers reflect on their instructional approaches.

The self-administered survey included nine items assessing how teachers adapt lessons to learners' needs, prepare lessons, use child-friendly methods and locally available materials, integrate content across subjects, employ learning aids, assess learners, provide timely feedback, and foster supportive learning environments that encourage self-discipline, responsibility, and creativity, with each item rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents' ratings were averaged to generate mean scores, with higher values indicating more positive self-perceptions of pedagogical skill.

#### 3.4.1 Findings at primary school level

Survey findings indicated that primary school teachers rated themselves highly on pedagogical skills, with an overall average score of 4.38 ( $SD = 0.56$ ), ranging from 1.7 to 5.0. Notably, primary teachers in Karamoja ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) had a significantly higher average score on pedagogical skills than their counterparts in West Nile ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ),  $t(1144) = 4.21$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, pedagogical skills scores were consistently high across genders, as illustrated in Figure 7 below:

**Figure 7: Primary teachers' mean score on pedagogical skills by gender**



In Karamoja, female teachers had a slightly higher average score on pedagogical skills than their male counterparts; however, this difference was not statistically significant at the 5% level,  $t(199) = 1.80$ ,  $p = .074$ . In contrast, in West Nile, male teachers had a marginally higher average score on pedagogical skills compared to female teachers, though still not significantly different  $t(943) = -0.75$ ,  $p = .452$ . Furthermore, at the overall level, there were no statistically significant gender differences in the average pedagogical skills scores among primary school teachers,  $t(1144) = 0.14$ ,  $p = .891$ .

These findings indicate a generally high level of self-perceived instructional proficiency among primary school teachers. Classroom observations corroborated these results, revealing a balance of commendable practices and notable areas for growth.

### 3.4.1.1 Planning and preparation for teaching

Of the 76 primary classrooms observed, most teachers (68.4%) demonstrated thorough preparation and planning for their lessons having both a scheme of work and lesson plan. A further 22.4% had either of the documents with the remaining 9.2% having nothing at all signalling a lack of adequate readiness for the lesson they were observed delivering.

Among teachers who had lesson plans, observations revealed a strong and consistent link between teachers' written lesson plans and the lessons actually delivered in classrooms. In most cases, teachers closely adhered to their plans, ensuring that objectives, content, methods, and assessments were not only outlined but also faithfully executed. This pattern held across both the West Nile and Karamoja subregions. It was repeatedly highlighted that what was written in the lesson plan was what unfolded in class. For instance, in a Top-Class Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit, one observer noted: "The lesson plan reflects what he actually delivered during the lesson. He followed it successfully." Similarly, another observer described a lesson for English in Primary 6 in Terego:

"The lesson plan closely aligns with the actual lesson delivered by the teacher. The objectives, teaching methods, learning activities, and assessment strategies were effectively implemented, which contributed to active learner engagement."

This fidelity to planning was evident in multiple ways—content alignment, logical flow, and the implementation of activities and strategies. For example, a Literacy lesson for Primary Three in Yumbe was highlighted for following planned activities step by step.

However, there were a few exceptions to this pointing to the existing planning and preparation gaps among primary school teachers. In some cases, short-term fidelity to lesson plans was not fully anchored in longer-term planning. Observers frequently noted that even where a lesson plan was in place, the corresponding scheme of work was either missing or did not include the actual lesson being delivered. One observer highlighted during a Primary Two Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit that "the lesson conducted did not appear in the scheme of work."

Other instances revealed occasional deviations or incomplete implementation, suggesting partial adherence to the plan. For example, one observer noted that while there was a clear link between the lesson and the plan, the teacher ended the session prematurely, as seen during a Primary 5 Mathematics lesson in Yumbe. According to the lesson observer,

"The teacher was following the lesson plan, but he did not finish it. He turned to give an assessment work without completing the planned activities yet there was enough time to continue."

In a few cases, only a few components of the lesson plan were reflected in actual delivery. Overall, the evidence suggests that though most primary teachers adequately plan for their lessons, creating practical guides for structuring content and delivery, inconsistencies in actual implementation of these lessons are prevalent. In addition, lapses in long-term planning reveal areas where further support could enhance consistency and effectiveness in lesson delivery.

### 3.4.1.2 Classroom control and management

This section examines how teachers establish order, maintain learner engagement, and create an environment conducive to learning. It focuses on the strategies teachers employ to nurture a safe space for learners, manage behaviour, and foster positive interactions that support both discipline and participation.

#### *Fostering a safe learning environment*

Across most classrooms observed, learners appeared to be protected from immediate physical dangers. The majority of learning spaces were described as "safe for learning", with both teachers and pupils making deliberate efforts to maintain order and cleanliness. Classrooms were often well-organised, with sturdy furniture and free from hazardous materials, reflecting a shared commitment to learner protection.

Observations from multiple study districts consistently echoed this general sense of safety. For instance, one observer in a Primary 5 classroom in Amudat noted,

"The classroom was clean and organised in rows and columns for easy accessibility. It was also free from

dangerous conditions.”

Another lesson observer during a Primary 3 Literacy lesson in Yumbe district noted,

“The classroom was safe and free from sharp objects, slippery floors and unsafe furniture. The room was also well lit and ventilated. Where furniture was adequate, learners sat comfortably, and rows and aisles allowed free movement for both pupils and teachers.”

Even improvised learning spaces demonstrated efforts to prioritise safety. For example, pupils studying under trees—mostly from the Karamoja sub-region—were observed learning in clean and relatively secure surroundings. One observer noted during a Primary 1 English lesson in Nabilatuk,

“Learners were studying under trees sitting on tarpaulins. There were no dangerous items or materials observed around the learning environment.”

However, beneath this generally positive picture of safety and order, observations also revealed persistent risks and vulnerabilities within several classrooms. Structural defects such as broken windows, cracked or worn-out walls, unsafe furniture, and neglected hazards frequently compromised learner safety. In many cases, observers reported “broken chairs and tables,” while in some cases, classrooms doubled as storage spaces for items like metallic beds posing clear risks to pupils. One observer noted during a Primary 4 Mathematics lesson in Amudat,

“The classroom is not safe for learning because metallic beds are in the classroom and these may hurt the learners.”

These risks were further compounded by environmental and infrastructural challenges. Some classrooms were built from temporary materials, lacked proper roofing, or had open ends and broken shutters that exposed learners to harsh weather conditions. For instance, an observer in Yumbe recorded during a Primary 4 Social Studies lesson,

“There was a hole in the classroom, the desks were closely packed with no windows to protect against rain.”

Similarly, during a Primary 1 Mathematics lesson in Madi-Okollo, one observer noted,

“The classroom was not safe for the learners because the back end of the classroom was open, allowing learners to jump off from outside. Some of the wooden timbers got removed, leaving sharp edges of broken timber exposed and uncondusive for the learners.”

Congestion was another challenge to maintaining a safe and effective learning environment. Observed primary classrooms averaged 78 learners per class (70 in Karamoja and 79 in West Nile), with numbers ranging from 15 to as many as 186. Overcrowding often created cramped and uncomfortable conditions, restricting movement and reducing safety. Learners were frequently squeezed “four on a desk with others sitting on the floor,” or confined to narrow spaces that limited both the teacher and learner mobility. One observer described a Primary 2 classroom in Nakapiripirit as,

“The classroom was not safe for learning. It was too squeezed and the pathways were very narrow. Even in the absence of sharp or dangerous objects, inadequate space itself presented a safety concern, contributing to discomfort, distraction, and reduced learning effectiveness.”

In addition to the structural and environmental risks, cleanliness emerged as a significant dimension of classroom safety. While several classrooms were orderly and well-maintained, others were described as “dirty, dusty and not swept,” with litter scattered across the floor. Such unhygienic conditions not only created discomfort but also increased the risk of accidents, infections, and allergic reactions—particularly in congested classrooms where learners sit in close proximity.

At times, the safety threats were non-structural but equally concerning. For example, during a Primary 6 English lesson, a stray dog was reported inside the classroom, yet no teacher intervention was observed. Such incidents point to the need for stronger teacher vigilance and proactive safety management.

Despite the presence of these hazards, teachers generally continued to deliver lessons as if conditions were normal. There was little evidence of corrective action or guidance on how learners should conduct themselves amidst these safety concerns. The neglect of basic sanitation mirrored the same lack of attention evident in addressing structural risks, highlighting how both physical decay and environmental untidiness stemmed from inadequate oversight. This pattern of inaction suggested a growing normalisation of unsafe learning environ-

ments, one rooted not only in infrastructural constraints but also in gaps in teacher agency, awareness and accountability for ensuring classroom safety.

Overall, while many classrooms exhibited commendable efforts to maintain safe and orderly conditions, the observations reveal enduring challenges related to infrastructure, overcrowding, and maintenance. These weaknesses compromise not only learners' physical safety but also the broader dynamics of classroom control, concentration, and teacher mobility. Collectively, they underscore the urgent need for stronger safety management practices and institutional accountability to create learning environments that truly support both well-being and effective instruction.

### ***Maintaining learners' attention and discipline***

While the state of the learning environment influenced the overall classroom climate, teachers' ability to sustain focus often determined whether learning could meaningfully occur despite infrastructural or spatial challenges. Teachers employed a wide range of strategies to secure and sustain learners' attention. A common practice involved the use of direct signals such as clapping, calling names, and verbal commands, and physical cues like pointing with a stick or rolled paper. Several teachers asked learners to clap to restore order, while others "used a stick to call for pupils' attention."

Verbal cues were equally common, including call-and-response routines such as "Hullo children?" followed by "Hullo teacher?" In lower primary and pre-primary classes, teachers frequently used songs and rhymes not only to regain focus or mark transitions but also to reinforce predictable routines associated with classroom norms. One observer, during a Primary 2 Mathematics lesson in Terego noted that,

"The teacher introduced singing to attract the learners' attention to the lesson such as the alphabet songs."

Another Primary 1 Literacy teacher in Yumbe noted,

"The teacher engaged learners in singing rhymes every after 5 – 7 minutes of teaching."

Calling learners by name emerged as a consistent approach where teachers often singled out inattentive learners as a way of managing off-task behaviour and promoting participation.

As one observer reported during a Primary 5 English lesson in Amudat,

"The teacher calls pupils by their names, especially those who are not paying attention in class."

In some cases, inattentive learners seated at the back were deliberately moved to the front to minimise disruption and encourage engagement during lesson activities. Another observer of a Primary 1 English lesson in Nabilatuk noted,

"Learners who were playing at the back of the class were taken to sit in front to bring back their attention."

Interactive strategies were also widely employed to sustain focus. Teachers asked random questions, encouraged peer demonstrations, and incorporated humour or storytelling to keep learners alert. For instance, one observer of a Primary 5 Social Studies lesson in Yumbe noted,

"The teacher would randomly pose a question to the class. Therefore, learners were attentive since they knew any time they might be called to respond. In smaller classes, teachers often ensured that each learner gives their view on the asked question while in a few, they engaged learners in group activities to maintain participation and focus."

A few teachers reinforced attentiveness through clearly stated behavioural expectations and consistent reminders. Positive reinforcement was observed where teachers gently redirected learners with prompts such as "look at the blackboard and not have micro meetings." Though rarely observed, rules and expectations were explicitly communicated at the start of some lessons. In classrooms where such a practice was observed, it was entirely the teacher setting these rules and expectations without learners' involvement. An observer in a Primary 4 Social Studies lesson in Yumbe said,

"At the start of the lesson, the teacher outlined the rules for learning and clearly communicated expectations for behaviour, helping learners understand what was expected of them. During the lesson, the teacher reminded learners to refrain from playing in class to minimise distractions, while re-echoing the

set rules and expectations.”

In most classrooms, most teachers addressed misbehaviour immediately without ignoring even the seemingly trivial instances, often arbitrating wrongdoing or requesting misbehaving learners to report to the staffroom after lessons. As one observer in a Primary 6 Social Studies lesson in Terego summarised,

“The teacher addressed inappropriate behaviour promptly and fairly, using positive reinforcement and gentle reminders to refocus learners.”

However, classroom size significantly influenced teachers’ ability to sustain learners’ attention. Overcrowded classes limited movement, increased noise, and made behaviour management more difficult. In contrast, classrooms with smaller numbers recorded little to no disruptive behaviour throughout the lessons. One observer described a Primary 3 Literacy lesson in Yumbe as,

“The class was big and the teacher was unable to control learners’ behaviour. The class was quite noisy, pupils were moving up and down, in and out of the classroom without permission. Some pupils were sleeping, others chatting and playing, especially those sitting at the back. The teacher mostly concentrated on pupils sitting in front.”

In settings where space was constrained and seating poorly arranged, maintaining order and engagement became increasingly challenging. Teachers who could not circulate effectively struggled to monitor learners or intervene promptly. In some cases, inappropriate behaviour went unchecked even when exclusively observed by the teacher. One observer in a Primary 4 Mathematics lesson in Terego recorded,

“The teacher attempted to maintain pupils’ attention through singing songs, but some learners at the back lost focus after the song and did their own things while the lesson was going on. When the teacher called learners to answer questions, some children from behind climbed over desks, others were sleeping, but she ignored the situation completely. The classroom was very small, no walking spaces making it difficult to reach all learners.”

A more concerning observation was the use of corporal punishment as a behavioural control measure, especially in classrooms across both refugee and host communities in the West Nile subregion. While some teachers merely displayed sticks as symbols of authority, others used them or issued verbal threats as a way of handling unbecoming conduct. Instances included slapping, hitting with sticks, or verbal intimidation. For example, during a Primary 5 Mathematics lesson in Yumbe, “the teacher slapped one of the pupils who was shouting in class.” Similarly, in Madi-Okollo, a Primary 4 Mathematics teacher “threatened to knock the head of a pupil who was playing during the lesson,” and in Yumbe, a Primary 3 English teacher, “gave two strokes to learners who didn’t give answers and they ended up crying.”

The continued use of corporal punishment, whether through direct physical action or intimidation, has serious implications for learner well-being and classroom climate. Fear-based discipline undermines the development of a supportive and trusting learning environment, replacing respect with anxiety and reducing participation.

Such practices not only violate children’s rights but also contravene the Children (Amendment) Act, 2016, which prohibits corporal punishment and promotes non-violent, rights-based approaches to discipline. The persistence of these practices therefore reflects a critical gap between policy and actual classroom behaviour management.

### ***Teacher-pupil relationships***

Closely linked to teachers’ ability to sustain learners’ attention and manage behaviour is the quality of relationships they build with their pupils. Observations revealed that effective classroom management was often underpinned by positive teacher–pupil relationships characterised by care, respect, and responsiveness. Teachers who established trust and warmth tended to maintain higher levels of attentiveness and cooperation among learners, creating classroom climates where pupils felt valued and motivated to participate.

Across most observed sessions, teacher–pupil relationships were described as positive, respectful, and nurturing, with very few exceptions. Observers consistently noted the absence of harsh interactions, frequent expressions of mutual respect, and deliberate teacher efforts to engage learners constructively. One of the most dominant themes emerging from the data was mutual respect: teachers treated learners with politeness, kindness, and patience, which learners reciprocated through cooperation and attentiveness.

Respect was also evident in how teachers managed errors and corrections. Many fostered a culture of respect for everyone’s views, responding calmly even when learners gave incorrect answers. As one observer noted

during a Primary 6 Social Studies lesson in Amudat,

“The teacher was respectful of the learners’ ideas...learners were respectfully corrected whenever the answer was wrong.”

Expressions of appreciation regardless of the correctness of the response were a common means of reinforcing effort and building confidence. Teachers frequently praised learners through verbal encouragement, clapping or creative forms of recognition. For example, one observer of a Primary 4 English lesson in Terego noted,

“Whenever a learner gave a correct answer...he or she was appreciated by the whole class through clapping, giving a flower or being called a president. Such gestures nurtured positive energy and enthusiasm, contributing to classrooms where learners felt safe, respected, and eager to engage.”

However, the observations also revealed contrasting experiences, highlighting variations in teacher attitudes and approaches. Despite the overall prevalence of positive interactions, some classrooms reflected strained or indifferent relationships through the teachers’ use of verbal threats, harsh tones, or corporal punishment as corrective actions. Additionally, other teachers displayed neglectful attitudes—particularly toward disengaged or backbench learners, as one observer of a Primary 3 Literacy lesson in Yumbe reported,

“The teacher treated learners with an ‘I don’t care’ attitude and some learners were also not bothered about the teacher’s presence in the classroom...the teacher said to the learners who were not attentive, ‘okay, you are here only for yourself’.”

These cases underscore how negative interactions can undermine classroom harmony, replacing respect with fear and disengagement. They highlight the importance of empathy, emotional intelligence, and consistent positive reinforcement in cultivating relationships that support both discipline and active learning.

### ***Conflict resolution within the classroom***

When disagreements did occur, teachers frequently modelled and facilitated positive learning environments, often encouraging open communication as a preventive approach. One observer noted during a Primary 2 Physical Education session in Amudat,

“The teacher talked to the learners and listened attentively to each of the learners. She made sure learners respected each other. Learners were encouraged to express their feelings and/or ideas.”

Teachers consistently sought to maintain calm, constructive environments while addressing conflict, creating safe spaces for learners to express themselves. As another observer remarked during a Primary 4 Social Studies lesson in Nakapiripirit,

“The teacher actively listened to learners that had misunderstandings in the classroom. The teacher maintained a calm and non-threatening environment to encourage open communication and de-escalate tension. Learners were involved in this process by expressing their perspectives and feelings respectfully.”

Such practices not only resolved immediate disputes but also modelled respectful communication, helping learners build confidence in handling disagreements constructively. Some teachers combined behavioural guidance with cultural or moral instruction. For example, in a Kindergarten - Top Class Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit, the teacher asked “the children to sing a traditional song that discourages inappropriate behaviour.” Others employed preventive strategies such as establishing class rules at the start of lessons, asking learners to recite them, or issuing light warnings when conflicts arose.

Furthermore, on a few occasions, teachers invited learner participation in conflict resolution. They offered guidance on how disagreements could be amicably handled, as one observer remarked during a Primary Six Science lesson in Yumbe: “The teacher gave the pupils a chance to express their feelings about each other and also guided them on how to talk about their feelings without yelling and violence.”

While such involvement empowers learners and promotes shared responsibility, most conflict resolution remained teacher-led. Consequently, learners had limited opportunities to actively develop critical social-emotional skills, such as empathy, negotiation, accountability, and peaceful handling of disagreements. Without direct engagement in resolving disagreements, learners risk becoming overly dependent on authority to manage even minor disputes, potentially hindering the development of autonomy and mutual respect among peers.

Moreover, not all conflict handling was ideal. Some teachers resorted to corporal or physically punitive mea-

tures. For example, one observer of a Primary 3 English lesson in Yumbe noted,

“The teacher beats those who fight in class”), while in another case, a teacher required learners involved in a fight to carry heavy stones as a form of punishment.”

Another observer of a Primary 5 Science lesson in Yumbe noted,

“He called the boy and the girl who had started a fight and asked them to settle the disagreement. He asked each what had happened in front of other pupils. He then gave stones, approximately 4 kg, to be carried by the boy for five minutes and later let him sit down.”

Such practices raise serious concerns about child safety and wellbeing, and contravene Section 106A of the Children Act, 2016 (Amendment), which prohibits corporal punishment in schools. In less severe but still concerning instances, teachers completely ignored the problematic behaviour altogether, failing to address conflicts meaningfully and leaving the root causes unresolved. One observer of a Primary 3 Literacy lesson in Yumbe reported,

“When two pupils started fighting because a boy had pinched a young girl causing her to cry, the teacher approached them to find out what the matter was and after learning about the issue, the teacher simply said, ‘you stop playing and pay attention.’”

Such instances of inaction, even when the behaviour appears minor, underscore missed opportunities for modelling effective conflict resolution and reinforcing classroom norms. By failing to address the root causes of disputes, teachers risk regularising disruptive behaviour, limiting learners’ ability to develop social-emotional skills, and weakening overall classroom management.

### **3.4.1.3 Delivery and presentation**

#### ***Learner participation***

Findings revealed that learner involvement in lesson delivery across the observed primary classrooms was generally encouraged but varied widely in depth, consistency, and quality. Teachers actively invited participation, yet this remained largely teacher-centred. In most classrooms, participation meant learners responding to the teacher prompts. Teachers commonly used questioning, reading aloud, writing on the chalkboard, or demonstrating tasks, maintaining a call-and-response rhythm typical of all classrooms in both Karamoja and West Nile. While teachers made deliberate efforts to engage learners through these methods, participation often remained superficial, with limited evidence of inquiry, critical thinking, or peer collaboration. Learners were active but rarely exploratory, responding rather than initiating dialogue.

The most common form of involvement was answering direct prompts from the teacher, with many observed lessons illustrating this pattern. In a Primary 2 Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit, “the teacher wrote figures on the chalkboard and randomly invited learners to read and identify specific figures.” Similarly, in a Primary 5 Mathematics lesson in Yumbe, “the teacher invited a learner to demonstrate how to use a learning material to the whole class.” These examples reflect visible learner involvement, yet the interaction remained largely teacher-directed and reactive.

A positive finding across many classrooms was the supportive rapport between teachers and learners. Teachers often ensured that all learners had “equal opportunities to participate” and reinforced this through praise such as “excellent” or “well done.” Some teachers used incentives such as promising to “buy sweets for learners who asked questions” as a way of motivating learners, demonstrating efforts to nurture curiosity and engagement.

Peer interaction, however, varied considerably. In many classrooms, learning was limited to individual responses to teacher prompts, with minimal peer-to-peer exchange. Yet in a few lessons where group work or collaborative exercises were introduced, learners engaged more meaningfully. For example, in a Primary 5 Science lesson in Yumbe, “the teacher asked the class to form five groups and each group to select representatives to pose and answer discussion questions. The representatives were asked to present their answers.” Likewise, during a Primary 3 English lesson in Amudat, “learners worked in groups of five to six to complete a class task, giving them opportunities to interact with their peers.” These practices demonstrated the potential of structured collaboration to enhance engagement and understanding.

Despite these efforts, the limited presence of learner-initiated inquiry was consistent across nearly all observed classrooms. Learners were rarely observed asking questions or pursuing their own lines of thought. In many classrooms, either the teacher did not invite questions, or learners remained silent even when encouraged to ask. As one observer noted during a Primary 5 English lesson in Madi-Okollo,

“The teacher allowed time for learners to ask questions although none took the opportunity.”

This suggests that while teachers may create openings for inquiry, learners may not yet feel confident or empowered to take them likely reflecting the persistence of traditional, teacher-centred dynamics.

Overall, most teachers recognise the value of learner participation and make genuine efforts to engage their pupils through questioning, demonstrations, and presentations. However, authentic participatory learning where learners initiate dialogue, collaborate with peers, and critically explore content remains limited. Teacher questioning continues to dominate classroom interaction, often in one direction, while opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and peer learning are not yet consistently embedded in daily practice.

### ***Use of teaching and learning materials***

The use of teaching and learning materials in primary classrooms varied widely, ranging from dynamic, creative use of instructional materials to complete reliance on chalk and talk. In some lessons, teachers made deliberate efforts to incorporate visual aids and locally available resources, while in others, instruction unfolded with no material support beyond the blackboard.

In a number classrooms, teaching remained largely traditional. Teachers relied primarily on the chalkboard, the syllabus, and textbooks, a minimalist approach where materials were limited to what was readily available and familiar. Even in classrooms decorated with charts, these were often left unused. As one observer noted during a Primary 1 Literacy lesson in Amudat,

“Even though charts were around the classroom, in this particular lesson, the teacher did not use any other material apart from her textbook and chalkboard.”

Such cases illustrate how the presence of materials does not always translate into their purposeful use.

In contrast, some teachers demonstrated a more resourceful and participatory approach. They employed a variety of visual and tactile materials—natural objects such as stones, shea tree seeds, and fruits; manila papers, charts, flashcards, counting sticks, and printed diagrams—to illustrate key concepts and stimulate learner engagement. During a Primary 6 Science lesson in Terego, for example, “the teacher used a chart showing a diagram of the structure of the heart and asked pupils to mention parts of the heart and state the function of each.” This kind of purposeful integration helped link abstract ideas to concrete representations, deepening understanding.

In the more interactive lessons, learners themselves took part in creating or handling materials. During a Primary 2 Physical Education class in Amudat, one observer recorded that “learners made their own drawings and materials like balls.” Similarly, in a Primary 3 Mathematics lesson in Yumbe, “the teacher told learners to come with stones which were used for counting.” Such improvisation and contextualisation of learning resources reflected teachers’ ability to adapt materials to their environment and actively involve learners in the process.

Teachers also drew on familiar, everyday objects to make learning relatable. In a Primary 1 English lesson, for instance, “the teacher used clothes worn by the pupils to teach about different types of attire—dresses, shirts, sweaters, shorts, and trousers.” Another teacher in a Primary 4 English class in Terego, “brought samples of soil, sand and sugar” to teach about countable and uncountable nouns.

In science lessons, teachers sometimes used real plants alongside printed picture cards for observation, as one observer described in a Primary 3 Science class in Yumbe, “the teacher used actual plants and printed picture cards with names written on manila cards. Learners were involved by observing, reading, and spelling the plant names, handling actual plants, and matching the name cards to the correct plants.” These examples demonstrate how connecting classroom learning to the learners’ environment can foster practical understanding and engagement.

Use of digital tools or technological aids was extremely rare. Across the 76 classrooms observed, only two teachers in West Nile were noted to have incorporated any form of technology into their lessons. This limited exposure suggests that integration of digital resources remains largely absent in most primary schools.

Despite these positive examples of creativity and learner involvement, many lessons were still conducted without any form of teaching aid. Several observations explicitly noted the absence of materials, with teachers relying solely on verbal explanations. In such classrooms, learners remained passive recipients of information. Even where materials were available, not all teachers engaged learners in their use. As one report from a Primary 5 English lesson in Yumbe stated,

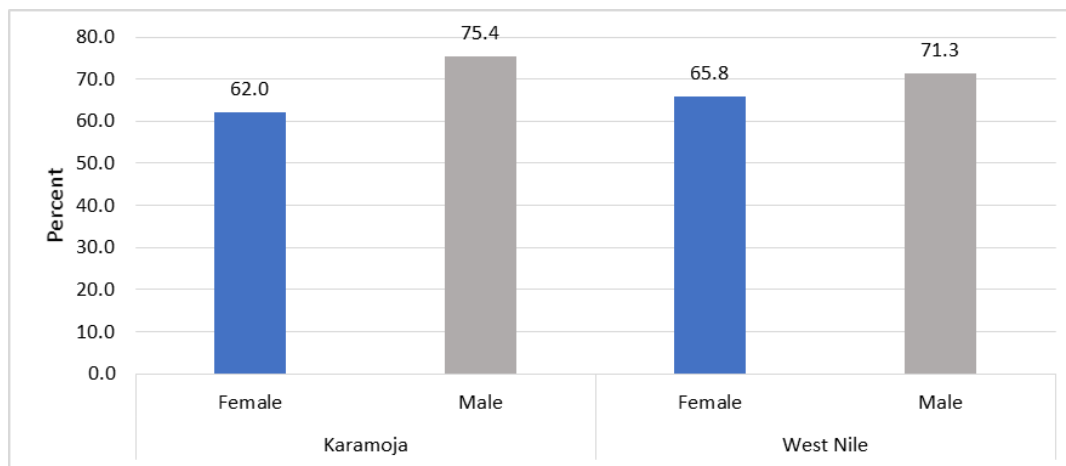
“The teacher brought teaching and learning materials but did not involve the learners in the use of these resources. Instead, the teacher showed and explained to learners.”

Therefore, these findings reveal that the effective use of teaching and learning materials remains uneven across classrooms. Their use depends largely on individual teachers’ creativity, initiative, and understanding of how instructional aids can enrich the learning process. The most vibrant and engaging lessons were those where materials were not only used but shared with learners, turning them from passive listeners into active participants in constructing their own learning experiences.

### ***Integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching and learning***

Survey findings revealed limited integration of ICT in classroom instruction, despite moderate levels of access among teachers. Most survey participants (69.5%) reported having access to ICT tools such as smartphones and computers, with relatively similar rates across the subregions—70.2% in Karamoja and 69.4% in West Nile. A gender gap was evident, with more males (72.0%) than females (65.0%) reporting access. This pattern was consistent across subregions, as illustrated in Figure 8 below:

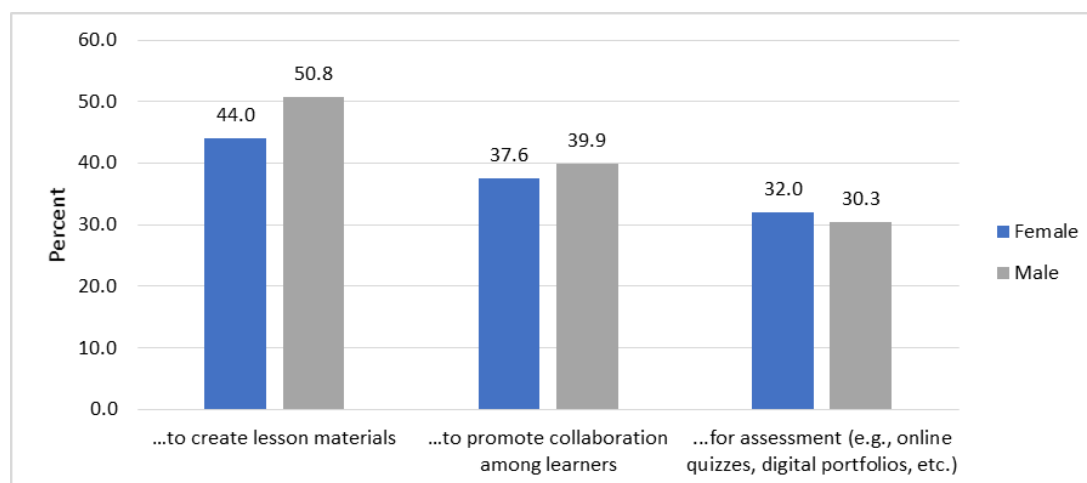
**Figure 8: Self-reported access to ICT tools among primary school teachers**



However, access did not consistently translate into effective use with only half (50.8%) of primary school survey participants reporting competence in using online search engines to access educational materials (45.0% of females and 54.0% of males). Among those with access to ICT tools, seven in ten (70.6%) indicated that they could locate educational materials online—though this capacity was notably higher in Karamoja (80.0%) than in West Nile (68.6%). This suggests that while access is relatively widespread, a significant portion of teachers, particularly in West Nile, face challenges in applying ICT tools effectively to support their professional practice.

Teachers’ reported use of ICT to support different dimensions of teaching and learning was generally low to moderate. Fewer than half (48.5%) used digital tools for lesson preparation and content creation, 39.1% leveraged technology to promote collaboration among learners, and only 30.9% applied ICT tools for assessment purposes such as online quizzes or digital portfolios. The rates of use did not differ significantly by gender or subregion (see Figure 9 below and Appendix 1). These findings indicate that while some teachers are beginning to integrate ICT into their instructional practices, the majority remain at an early stage of adoption, often constrained by limited skills, confidence, or contextual support.

**Figure 9: Self-reported use of ICT among primary school teachers**



Classroom observations largely reinforced these survey findings. Across nearly all lessons observed, ICT integration was minimal or entirely absent. Most classrooms relied solely on traditional teaching methods, with little evidence of digital tools being used to enhance instruction or learner engagement. However, a few isolated examples illustrated emerging practices and the potential of ICT when meaningfully applied.

In one Primary 5 Social Studies lesson in Yumbe, for instance, the teacher used a mobile phone to display a picture related to the topic being taught. Though this represented a basic attempt to integrate technology, its use was largely passive as the phone functioned as a static display rather than an interactive or well-integrated instructional tool. In contrast, a Primary Six Social Studies lesson in Terego showcased a more deliberate and effective use of ICT. The teacher employed a range of digital resources, including educational videos, online simulations, and multimedia content, which were thoughtfully embedded within the lesson. These tools helped clarify abstract concepts, sustain learners' interest, and promote active participation.

These findings point to a landscape where ICT access among primary teachers is moderately high, but meaningful pedagogical integration remains limited. These findings highlight a systemic gap in ICT integration within primary schools, where the absence of institutional support, insufficient digital infrastructure, and limited teacher competence collectively hinder the effective incorporation of ICT into lesson planning and instruction. The few examples of effective ICT use demonstrate its potential to enrich teaching and learning, provided teachers receive the necessary support in terms of training, infrastructure, and digital resources. Strengthening these areas would not only enhance teachers' confidence and competence in using ICT but also contribute to more engaging, interactive, and inclusive learning environments in primary schools.

The findings reflect a systemic gap in ICT implementation within primary schools, where the absence of institutional support, inadequate digital infrastructure, and limited teacher competence collectively constrain the effective incorporation of ICT into lesson planning and instruction. The few observed instances of effective ICT use illustrate its potential to enrich teaching and learning when supported by appropriate training, infrastructure, and digital resources. Strengthening these areas would not only build teachers' confidence and competence in using ICT but also foster more engaging, interactive, and inclusive learning environments across primary schools.

### ***Linking content to learners' contexts and experiences***

Across the observed primary classrooms, teachers demonstrated varying levels of effectiveness in connecting lesson content to learners' everyday experiences. While some skilfully integrated real-life examples and practical demonstrations that made learning relevant and tangible, others relied heavily on textbooks and abstract explanations, leaving lessons detached from learners' lived realities.

In several classrooms, the link between lesson content and everyday life was both deliberate and well-executed. Teachers who adopted this approach used real materials, relatable examples, and hands-on activities. For instance, a Primary 5 Science teacher in Madi-Okollo asked pupils to rub their palms together to feel friction in real time while during a Primary 3 Literacy lesson in Yumbe, one teacher took learners outside to observe and name plants around the school compound, helping them connect scientific ideas to familiar experiences. Similarly, a few teachers brought living materials into the classroom helping learners connect what they learn in

class to their environment, as one observer noted during a Primary 3 Literacy lesson in Yumbe,

“The teacher reinforced the lesson by using real, familiar plants from the learners’ surroundings. She brought into the classroom a cocoyam, a bean plant, a mango branch, and a maize plant. She then asked the learners to name each plant first in their local language and then in English.”

These strategies grounded abstract ideas in concrete experience, deepening understanding and retention. Some teachers went further by deliberately drawing on learners’ homes and communities as reference points for learning, integrating indigenous knowledge and local practices into formal content. Lessons on wild animals, temperatures, agriculture, and road safety were tied directly to learners’ environments and daily experiences. In Yumbe, a Primary 1 Literacy teacher discussed road safety, emphasizing dos and don’ts when crossing the road. In Amudat, a Primary 5 Social Studies teacher while teaching on “wild animals, their importance, where they live, and how they help economically” connected the topic to livelihood practices, explaining how selling animal skins could generate income. Though the example raises ethical questions, it nevertheless demonstrated an attempt to make learning socio-economically meaningful.

Likewise, in Yumbe, a Primary 5 Science teacher related the “use of fertilizers by tobacco farmers to healthy growth and good yield,” making scientific ideas relevant to agricultural life. Such efforts helped learners see that classroom knowledge could extend beyond classroom walls and apply directly to their communities.

A few teachers also brought learners’ voices into lessons, inviting them to share personal experiences and reflect on familiar tasks from home. This approach not only enhanced the personal relevance of lessons but also validated learners’ experiences as meaningful sources of knowledge. For example, during a Primary Three English lesson in Amudat, learners were asked to read and write the names of places they knew. Similarly, in a Primary 4 Mathematics lesson in Terego, an observer remarked,

“The teacher made explicit connections between the lesson content and learners’ everyday experiences using real-life examples and scenarios to illustrate key concepts. The teacher invited learners to share their own experiences and related them to the lesson content.”

Furthermore, in a few classrooms, teachers encouraged reflection on how lessons related to learners’ lives and values. During a Primary Four Social Studies lesson in Yumbe, for instance, the teacher asked pupils to explain the importance of the lesson in their daily lives, prompting reflections on values such as forgiveness and cooperation.

However, such practices were the exception rather than the norm. In most classrooms, connections between learning and real life were either weak or entirely absent. Many teachers depended solely on textbook content, treating it as the only source of knowledge. Some limited their examples to the school compound, offering little insight into broader relevance. As one observer noted during a Primary 5 English lesson in Madi-Okollo,

“The teacher relied solely on textbook examples during the lesson, with no attempt to use additional teaching aids or real-life examples to relate the content to learners’ daily lives.”

In other cases, lessons remained abstract, and even when teachers hinted at relevance, they seldom expanded on it. This detachment left learners without a meaningful anchor, limiting their ability to transfer knowledge beyond the classroom.

Overall, the findings reveal both promise and inconsistency in efforts to connect classroom learning to learners’ daily lives. Where teachers used local examples, tangible materials, and experiential methods, learners appeared more likely to transfer knowledge to familiar contexts. Conversely, when instruction was confined to textbooks and abstract explanations, lessons tended to be disconnected from real life.

#### **3.4.1.4 Assessment and evaluation**

##### ***Forms of assessment***

Observations revealed a blend of formative and summative assessment strategies primarily aimed at checking learners’ understanding, monitoring progress, and informing instruction. Across classrooms, teachers employed questioning, exercises, group discussions, written and verbal assessments, and practical demonstrations as their main techniques. These assessments were typically immediate, interactive, and integrated within the teaching process, aligning with the continuous assessment approach common in primary education.

Questioning techniques were a common form of formative assessment. Most teachers relied heavily on recall-

based questions focused on definitions, facts, and procedures to assess comprehension and review prior knowledge. Oral questions and short quizzes were frequently used throughout lessons to engage learners and check understanding. One observer noted during a Primary 1 English lesson in Nabilatuk,

“The teacher kept on asking questions throughout the lesson. Questions were based on and related to what was being taught in class.”

These questions helped verify factual understanding and reinforce key concepts, ensuring learners could reproduce information accurately.

Teachers often began lessons by revisiting earlier content, using questions to activate learners’ memory and link past and present lessons. This approach allowed teachers to gauge retention and establish a foundation for new learning. While effective for consolidating basic knowledge, such recall-oriented questioning tended to restrict opportunities for broader reasoning or real-world application.

Questioning also served to identify misconceptions and prompt clarification. Teachers frequently checked whether learners understood specific examples or explanations. As one observer reported during a Primary 2 Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit,

“The teacher asked questions in relation to the lesson to evaluate learners’ understanding. Learners answered, and the teacher corrected them where they didn’t get it right.”

Alongside recall questions, teachers often used short, closed-ended prompts such as “Have you understood?”, “Is s/he right?” or “Have I explained myself well enough?” to confirm attentiveness and reinforce correct responses. Although these checks served an immediate purpose, they rarely extended the learners’ thinking or encouraged elaboration, as responses were typically limited to “yes” or “no”.

In a few classrooms, teachers made efforts to make learning more engaging and relevant by asking contextual or real-life questions. These open-ended prompts encouraged learners to connect lesson content with their experiences and think more critically. As one observer described during a Primary 6 Social Studies lesson in Terego,

“The teacher asks open-ended and probing questions to encourage critical thinking, assess understanding, and promote discussion for deeper learning and engagement.”

By grounding questions in familiar contexts, teachers helped learners link academic concepts to daily life, fostering more meaningful learning.

However, questioning practices varied widely in terms of learner participation. In many classrooms, questioning was primarily teacher-led, with few opportunities for learners to pose their own questions. Observers frequently noted that “learners did not ask any questions and were not given a chance to do so.” In contrast, some teachers actively encouraged pupils to ask questions and engage in dialogue. For example, in a Primary 6 Science lesson in Yumbe, the teacher “encouraged learners to ask questions and appreciated those who managed to ask.” Similarly, in another Primary 6 Social Studies lesson in Terego, the learners “were encouraged to ask questions and the teacher responded thoughtfully, providing clarification, guidance, and feedback to support understanding.” These contrasting practices highlight how classroom questioning can either foster or limit learner agency, depending on how it is managed.

Another frequent form of assessment was the use of written exercises administered after instruction to evaluate understanding. Immediate marking and feedback were consistent features across classrooms, with teachers often marking learners’ work during or shortly after the lesson. As one observer noted during a Primary 3 Literacy lesson in Amudat,

“The teacher gave learners an exercise based on the topic being taught. After marking the exercise, the teacher guided the learners through corrections to reinforce understanding.”

Similarly, during a Primary 4 Science lesson in Yumbe, “the teacher gave an exercise to the learners after teaching. Learners answered, and the teacher marked their work.” This recurring pattern—teach, assign, mark and correct, illustrates a formative cycle that enabled learners to receive immediate feedback and consolidate learning. The consistent reliance on short written tasks reflected teachers’ emphasis on accountability and comprehension checking.

In addition to individual exercises, some teachers used group assessments and discussions to promote

collaborative learning and peer evaluation. For example, during a Primary 4 Mathematics lesson in Terego, “the teacher used class discussions, quizzes, and group work to evaluate and monitor learners’ understanding.” Such practices demonstrate an understanding of formative assessment as an ongoing process, integrating oral, written, and observational techniques. They also highlight efforts to assess both the process and outcomes of group learning, fostering teamwork and communication skills.

Peer assessment, though less common, was observed in several classrooms. In a Primary 4 Social Studies lesson in Nakapiripirit, for instance, “learners assessed each other’s work, providing feedback and learning from each other.” These examples suggest that some teachers actively cultivated supportive environments where learners could express themselves, give and receive feedback, and take shared responsibility for learning. Although less frequent than traditional exercises, such participatory assessment practices reflect an emerging shift toward more learner-centred approaches.

Practical and performance-based assessments were also noted, particularly in subjects requiring demonstration or identification. During a Primary 6 Science lesson in Terego, for example, “the teacher drew the maize plant on the chalkboard, labelled the parts and tasked learners to draw, label and explain the uses of each part.” These activities combined creativity, observation, and hands-on learning—key features of active, child-centred pedagogy.

A few teachers demonstrated a more comprehensive approach by integrating formative, summative, peer, and self-assessment methods. Homework and extended tasks were often used as summative tools. As one observer summarized in a Primary 4 Social Studies lesson in Nakapiripirit,

“Formative assessments like quick quizzes; summative assessments like short graded assignments; peer assessments where students assess each other’s work and provide feedback; and self-assessments that help learners reflect on their own learning and identify prior knowledge and skills.”

This example captures a balanced assessment ecosystem in which learners are both evaluated and actively engaged in evaluating themselves and their peers.

However, assessment practices were not consistent across classrooms. In some cases, assessments were entirely teacher-led, while in others, they were absent altogether. As one observer noted during a Primary 5 Science lesson in Yumbe,

“The teacher did not ask pupils questions during the lesson. Instead, he gave notes for learners to write.”

These inconsistencies point to the need for more deliberate planning and implementation of assessment strategies to ensure that learning objectives are consistently measured and that all learners have opportunities for meaningful engagement and feedback.

### ***Handling and use of assessment results***

Across most classrooms observed, teachers used assessment to gauge learners’ understanding, guide instruction, and provide immediate feedback, though practices varied considerably. Lessons often involved prompt correction of misconceptions, targeted explanations, and individual support where needed. Teachers encouraged learners to complete unfinished work, reinforced effort through praise, and celebrated correct responses to sustain engagement and confidence.

Assessment results served multiple purposes beyond gauging comprehension. Teachers used them to identify learning gaps, monitor progress, and tailor instruction—re-teaching difficult concepts, offering additional practice, or adjusting lesson delivery to meet learners’ needs. They also employed results to recognise achievement, track improvement over time, and foster healthy competition among learners or groups.

A common practice observed was the use of assessment for motivation and recognition. Many primary school teachers created a positive atmosphere by praising or leading the class to applaud learners who answered correctly. As one observer noted during a Primary 1 Mathematics lesson in Madi-Okollo,

“The teacher used the results to appreciate the groups who passed the assignment and used it as an example for others.”

Other teachers publicly commended high-performing learners, asking classmates to applaud them, reinforcing both achievement and effort.

Despite these frequent assessment activities, record keeping remained inconsistent. Most teachers did not

systematically document classwork or daily assignment results. Exercises were often marked and corrected immediately, but scores were rarely recorded, limiting the potential for tracking individual learner progress. In contrast, a handful of teachers documented results in exercise books, registers, or files, particularly for end-of-term assessments used in reporting, promotion decisions, and parent feedback. One observer remarked during a Primary 5 Science lesson in Yumbe,

“The teacher did not keep records of daily class assessments but keeps termly records.”

A few teachers also displayed records on classroom walls to track learning progress and identify learners needing additional support.

Where records existed, they informed lesson planning, remedial instruction, and targeted interventions. Even teachers who did not keep daily records often used assessment insights to adjust instruction—for instance, re-teaching topics when many learners performed poorly or organising group reading sessions and peer learning to strengthen comprehension skills.

Generally, assessment practices were not consistent across classrooms. Some teachers neither documented nor used assessment information to inform instruction, suggesting that while most recognised the value of assessment, its systematic application and record keeping varied widely.

### **3.4.1.5 Inclusion and Gender Sensitivity**

Ensuring inclusive and gender-sensitive teaching is vital for achieving equity in learning. Classroom observations across primary schools illustrated how teachers addressed these priorities, highlighting both strong examples of inclusive practice and persistent areas for growth.

#### ***Learners with disabilities***

While several classrooms demonstrated inclusive practices, the participation of learners with disabilities varied significantly across observed lessons, largely depending on teachers’ awareness and responsiveness. In some cases, teachers made commendable efforts to support inclusion. For example, learners with visual or hearing impairments were deliberately seated at the front for better access, and some teachers repeated explanations or allowed additional time for task completion. During a Primary 2 Literacy lesson in Terego, one observer noted,

“One learner with hearing impairment sits in a group close to the blackboard, and the teacher calls her to write answers and speaks loudly to help her hear.”

Similarly, in a Primary 3 Mathematics lesson in Yumbe, a teacher provided extra time for learners with writing difficulties while maintaining fairness as the observer remarked,

“All the learners with disability are treated equally, but special consideration is given to those with problems in writing. More time is allocated to them.”

Another observer noted during a Primary 2 English lesson in Nabilatuk,

“The teacher always kept checking on learners with needs—for example, there were two learners who were having difficulty in writing because they all had a single arm. The teacher was not rushing with the lesson”

Inclusive group work also featured in some classrooms. Teachers encouraged collaboration by integrating learners with disabilities into diverse peer groups and providing targeted support during discussions and activities. An observer in a Primary 4 Mathematics lesson in Yumbe reported,

“There was one learner with a hearing disability. The teacher involved her in group work and gave her group special attention. The teacher made her sit in front to help her catch up with the others.”

Despite these positive practices, several classrooms exhibited only partial or minimal inclusion. In some cases, teachers failed to adapt instruction or meaningfully involve learners facing difficulties. A common practice involved placing learners with disabilities in groups without offering any additional support. More concerning were instances where learners with disabilities were completely unsupported throughout the lesson. Some teachers appeared unaware of such learners, even when their presence was confirmed during pre-observation discussions. For instance, during a Primary 3 English lesson in Yumbe, one observer noted,

“There was a deaf child in the class. The teacher didn’t do anything to ensure the boy was involved in the lesson.”

This reflects significant gaps in teacher awareness, training, and intentionality regarding inclusive pedagogy.

While many teachers promoted equal treatment and avoided overt discrimination, genuine inclusion requires active engagement, not just the physical presence of learners with disabilities. Treating all learners “the same,” as observed in some classrooms, can unintentionally neglect individual support needs. Achieving inclusive education therefore depends on balancing equality with equity, ensuring that every learner receives the specific support necessary to participate meaningfully in learning.

### ***Catering to different learning needs***

Observations from several primary classrooms revealed a wide spectrum of teacher awareness and responsiveness toward learners with diverse abilities and learning needs. While some teachers demonstrated deliberate and inclusive practices, others appeared unaware or only responded when prompted. Across the sample, teachers exhibited varying levels of sensitivity and adaptation to learners’ different learning profiles.

In many classrooms, teachers showed clear awareness of learners’ varying abilities and needs. One observer noted during a Primary 3 Literacy lesson in Yumbe,

“The teacher showed genuine awareness of these learners by closely attending to their unique needs and providing ongoing support so that every learner feels included and valued.”

Such teachers made intentional efforts to involve all children, calling them by name, monitoring their progress, and encouraging active participation. Another observer described a Primary 1 Literacy lesson in Nakapiripirit,

“The teacher assigned a task in which learners matched garden tools to their names and moved around the classroom to assist those who were not writing.”

These examples highlight purposeful engagement strategies such as guided practice and movement around the classroom to reach learners who might otherwise struggle or lose focus.

Several teachers also displayed patience and individualized attention. As one observer reported during a Primary 2 Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit,

“The teacher understood all his learners well. He was patient and genuinely wanted everyone to be involved in the lesson.”

This patience was often coupled with continuous assessment and targeted support. For example, during a Primary 5 Science lesson in Yumbe one observer noted,

“The teacher gave extra time to learners with learning difficulties so they could catch up with others, and provided personalized teaching to pupils who were lagging behind.”

Such practices illustrate a growing recognition among some teachers that differentiated instruction and personal engagement are essential to inclusive education.

However, not all classrooms reflected this level of responsiveness. In several instances, teachers demonstrated only partial or inconsistent awareness of learners with diverse needs. Some recognized learners who struggled but failed to follow through with targeted support. Others treated the class uniformly, perhaps in an effort to be fair, but inadvertently overlooked learners who required additional attention. For instance, one observer of a Primary 3 English lesson in Madi-Okollo reported,

“The teacher focused mainly on responsive learners seated at the front, while those at the back or with challenges were left unnoticed. One pupil with a hearing difficulty was left playing while others engaged in group activities.”

Such examples indicate that awareness alone does not always translate into inclusive action.

Overall, the findings present a mixed picture. While there are encouraging signs of inclusive pedagogy—such as differentiated instruction, active monitoring, and empathetic classroom management—there remains a significant proportion of teachers who lack the awareness, consistency, or strategies needed to effectively identify and support learners with different learning needs.

### ***Gender inclusivity***

Observations from various classrooms revealed a generally positive trend toward gender-balanced participation,

though the degree of teacher intentionality and consistency was uneven. In several classrooms, equal participation was clearly evident. Teachers made deliberate efforts to involve both girls and boys in class discussions and learning activities, reflecting a conscious awareness of gender inclusion.

Strategies such as random selection, alternating between genders, and pairing boys and girls for tasks were common and promoted fairness and visibility for all learners. As one observer noted during a Primary 2 Mathematics lesson in Terego,

“The teacher ensured gender balance in class participation by deliberately selecting both girls and boys to engage in the lesson activities, thereby promoting equal opportunities for all learners.”

In another Primary 3 English class in Terego, the teacher “picked one boy and one girl to come in front and present a dialogue on living things,” demonstrating an intentional effort to balance participation.

Some teachers also encouraged mixed-gender collaboration through group work and seating arrangements. Several classrooms displayed boys and girls sitting together, while teachers often created groups that included learners of both genders. In one instance, during a Primary 6 Mathematics lesson in Yumbe, the teacher “made sure that the five groups created had chairpersons and secretaries balanced between girls and boys.”

Such practices not only supported inclusive participation but also helped reinforce the idea that leadership roles are open to all learners regardless of gender.

Teachers occasionally made deliberate efforts to build girls’ confidence, especially where they appeared shy or hesitant. One teacher in a Primary 4 English class in Terego “encouraged more girls to participate because the girls looked a bit shy,” creating a supportive environment that empowered girls to engage more actively in the lesson.

Despite these positive practices, gender imbalances persisted in several classrooms. Some teachers did not consciously monitor participation across genders, leading to uneven engagement. For example, one observer reported during a Primary 4 Mathematics lesson in Amudat,

“Only boys were involved in the lesson activities. The teacher didn’t do anything to ensure girls also participate.”

Conversely, in a Primary 4 Science lesson in Yumbe, “girls were more active than boys in class and the teacher’s interest was more on the girls than the boys.” These examples highlight the need for teachers to maintain attentiveness to both genders to avoid unintentional bias. Similarly, in a Primary 3 Literacy class in Yumbe, “most of the active participants were boys seated at the front, and the teacher kept calling on the same learners to respond.” This indicates that while many teachers strive for equality, others still allow traditional participation dynamics to persist unchallenged.

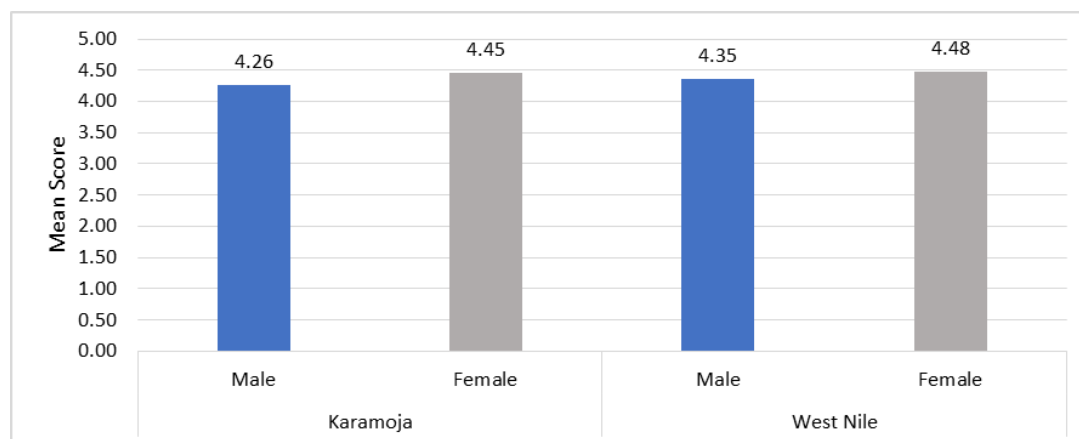
In most classrooms, traditional gender norms and beliefs remained largely unchallenged and, in some cases, unintentionally reinforced. A few observations revealed that girls and boys did not interact freely, sometimes due to separate seating arrangements. For instance, in a Primary 1 Literacy lesson in Yumbe, “there was minimal effort to challenge gender norms as the majority of boys sat in front while girls sat behind,” suggesting that spatial arrangements can perpetuate gendered participation even when verbal engagement appears balanced.

Overall, the observations revealed that many teachers demonstrated commendable efforts to ensure that both girls and boys were equally engaged through alternating participation, equitable grouping, and deliberate inclusion. However, gaps remain, particularly in addressing ingrained gender norms and subtle patterns of exclusion. While gender parity in participation is becoming more visible and valued, moving beyond equal opportunity toward genuine gender sensitivity—where teachers actively question stereotypes, monitor participation patterns, and foster equitable voice—remains a critical next step toward achieving gender-transformative education.

### 3.4.2 Findings at secondary school level

Survey results indicated that secondary school teachers rated themselves highly on pedagogical skills, with an overall average score of 4.38 ( $SD = 0.55$ ), ranging from 2.0 to 5.0. However, average scores on pedagogical skills were not significantly different among secondary school teachers in Karamoja ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) and those in West Nile ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ),  $t(560) = -1.19$ ,  $p = .236$ . Additionally, pedagogical skills scores among secondary teachers were consistently high across genders, as seen in Figure 10 overleaf:

**Figure 10: Secondary teachers' mean score on pedagogical skills by gender**



In Karamoja, female secondary teachers had a slightly higher average score than male teachers, though the difference was not statistically significant at the 5% level,  $t(97) = 1.62, p = .109$ . Conversely, in West Nile, female teachers had significantly higher average scores on pedagogical skills than their male counterparts at the 5% level,  $t(461) = 2.31, p = .011$ . At the overall level, female secondary teachers ( $M = 4.47, SD = 0.52$ ) had significantly higher average pedagogical skills scores than male secondary teachers ( $M = 4.34, SD = 0.56$ ),  $t(560) = 2.78, p = .003$ .

Despite teachers' high self-ratings of their pedagogical skills, classroom observations revealed a mix of satisfactory practices alongside recurring gaps. The pedagogical practices observed in classrooms were largely similar among teachers across the West Nile and Karamoja subregions.

#### 3.4.2.1 Planning and preparation for teaching

Observations revealed varying levels of preparation and planning among secondary school teachers, particularly regarding the availability and quality of schemes of work and lesson plans. In most classrooms, teachers demonstrated a high level of readiness for instruction, supported by comprehensive and well-developed schemes of work and clearly structured lesson plans. These documents were typically well written, organised, and detailed, a practice evidenced among just over half (52.5%) of the 40 teachers who were observed.

In such cases, lessons were well-structured and purposeful, showing clear alignment between intended learning outcomes, planned instructional activities, and classroom delivery. As one observer noted during a Senior 2 Biology lesson in Yumbe,

"The teacher's lesson plan and the flow of the lesson conducted were the same. He followed all the steps during his lesson."

Similarly, another observer reported on a Senior 3 Mathematics lesson in Nabilatuk,

"There was a close relationship between the lesson plan and the actual lesson conducted by the teacher. The learning expectations, lesson activities for both the teacher and the learners, references, and intended outputs from activities were all in agreement."

Additionally, in several instances, observers also found that lesson content closely matched the corresponding scheme of work, reinforcing coherence in instructional planning and delivery. For example, during a Senior 1 Chemistry lesson in Terego, an observer noted,

"The scheme of work and lesson plan had exactly what the teacher was teaching in terms of content, assessment, teaching aids, activities, and key learning outcomes."

Worth noting is that, while many teachers had clear and coherent lesson plans, some struggled to implement them fully during lessons. This suggests challenges related to time management or difficulties in allocating content appropriately within the scheduled period. Consequently, several lessons extended beyond their planned duration. For instance, during a Senior 1 Religious Education lesson in Terego district, the teacher's delivery followed the planned content and sequence but the session exceeded the allotted time as the observer said,

“The lesson flowed as was planned on the topic ‘Worship’, subtopic ‘Worship in the Lives of the Apostles in the Bible’. The teacher introduced the topic, and students defined worship and summarised the forms of worship of the apostles. However, the lesson took one hour which was beyond the 40 minutes initially planned.”

Not all the teachers, however, demonstrated this level of preparedness. Over a quarter (27.5%) of those observed lacked essential planning documents altogether, while 20% had only one of the two required documents. This indicates a significant gap in instructional planning at the secondary level and suggests that schools are inconsistent in enforcing the preparation of structured teaching guides. Such inconsistency reflects weak adherence to curriculum standards and professional guidelines and may, in part, point to a lack of personal initiative or motivation among some teachers to engage in thorough instructional planning.

In classrooms where planning documents were missing, teachers often relied primarily on textbooks (both learners’ and teachers’ guides), impromptu notes, or their own recollection. While in a few cases the absence of formal plans did not severely disrupt lesson flow, it generally limited coherence and depth. Without structured guidance, transitions between activities tended to be less deliberate, learners’ tasks were not always clearly defined, and opportunities for assessment were sometimes overlooked. As a result, although some teachers managed to sustain learner engagement through experience and improvisation, the absence of documented plans often undermined the consistency and overall quality of instruction.

Overall, while the majority of teachers exhibited commendable preparation and strong alignment between lesson plans and classroom practice, notable inconsistencies persisted. The absence or incomplete use of planning documents among some teachers indicates uneven adherence to professional teaching standards. These gaps in teacher preparedness directly affect the quality of lesson delivery and, consequently, undermine the curriculum’s goal of equipping students with the necessary competencies.

### **3.4.2.2 Classroom control and management**

#### ***Maintaining a safe learning environment***

Across most classrooms observed, learners were protected from immediate physical dangers. Spaces were consistently described as clean, orderly, free from hazardous materials, and generally “safe for learning,” reflecting a broad commitment to learner protection across study districts. During a Senior 3 Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit, for example, an observer noted,

“The classroom was well mopped and very clean. Desks were neatly arranged in rows, with wide pathways that allowed for easy movement. No hazardous items or materials were observed.”

A similar observation emerged from a Senior 2 Biology lesson in Yumbe,

“The classroom was safe and free from sharp objects, slippery floors and unsafe furniture. The room was well lit and ventilated.”

Good ventilation, adequate lighting, and sturdy furniture were repeatedly cited as defining features of safe learning spaces.

Teachers often played an active role in sustaining this environment. One teacher during a Senior 4 Physics lesson “greeted the learners cheerfully and kindly asked them to rearrange the classroom and collect a few scattered papers before the lesson began,” reinforcing a classroom culture grounded in order and cleanliness. Many rooms offered conditions that naturally supported safety—cool aeration, wide pathways, clear rows and columns, and ample visibility that allowed teachers to access all learners. In a few instances, additional safety measures were present, such as the fire extinguisher noted during a Senior 1 Geography class in Nabilatuk, providing a safeguard against small fire outbreaks.

However, beneath this generally positive picture, several risks and vulnerabilities remained. Observers reported structural defects such as broken windows, worn-out walls, roof leakages, and damaged furniture that compromised safety in meaningful ways. Environmental and infrastructural challenges, including insufficient roofing and exposure to weather, also posed hazards. Cleanliness was inconsistent as many classrooms were described as “dirty, dusty and not swept,” with litter scattered across the floors. Even when such hazards were visible, teachers did not always intervene. As one observer noted during a Senior 5 Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit,

“The classroom was not safe for learners. It was dirty, dusty, and contained dangerous items like broken

chairs and tables. There were no steps taken by the teacher to address these issues.”

Another observer noted during a Senior 1 Agriculture lesson in Yumbe,

“Wasps were breeding in the classroom, but the teacher appeared unaware and took no action to remove them.”

Space constraints also emerged as a recurring, indirect safety concern. Although the average class size was relatively modest, 47 learners overall (36 in Karamoja and 50 in West Nile), class sizes ranged dramatically from 3 to 165 learners. A few classrooms were extremely congested, creating cramped, uncomfortable, and less safe conditions. In such contexts, learners struggled while copying notes, shared desks beyond capacity, and in one classroom in Madi-Okollo, some were “sitting on stones in order for them to have a place to sit.” Even in otherwise safe environments, limited space restricted teacher movement and heightened learner discomfort.

These observations were validated by teachers’ reflections during FGDs as they expressed difficulty in handling large class sizes, as one male teacher in Terego noted,

“The class size is a challenge. The rooms are fully packed, making group work very difficult. We’ve tried arranging desks in a circular style, but the congestion still makes it hard for teachers to monitor learners during discussions. These large class sizes make implementing the new curriculum extremely difficult.”

### ***Maintaining learners’ attention and discipline***

Teachers employed a variety of strategies to maintain students’ attention, reflecting a strong emphasis on engagement, inclusivity, and discipline. A common approach was beginning lessons with recaps or reviews of previous content, which helped learners mentally prepare for the lesson and reinforced prior learning while encouraging active participation and valuing diverse thinking.

Direct questioning and random selection were also widely used to sustain focus. Observers frequently noted teachers calling on students by name to ensure every learner remained engaged. Inattentive students were often singled out to mitigate off-task behaviour and encourage active participation. For example, during a Senior 2 Mathematics lesson in Nabilatuk, one observer reported,

“The teacher knew each student by name and called on them at random, keeping everyone attentive since any student could be asked to participate at any time.”

Positive reinforcement complemented these strategies, with teachers acknowledging contributions to motivate learners to encourage participation.

Behavioural expectations were consistently reinforced alongside engagement strategies. Many teachers set clear rules for participation, such as requiring learners to raise their hands rather than shout out answers or arranging seating to minimise distractions. During a Senior 5 Geography lesson in Yumbe, an observer noted that the teacher encouraged learners to “raise their hands rather than answer in unison and reminded them to stay attentive and avoid making unnecessary noise.” Minor misbehaviour was addressed promptly and constructively, with teachers repositioning students, assigning classroom responsibilities, or gently correcting inappropriate conduct. In one instance, a teacher asked a student to button up their shirt before attending class, integrating personal discipline with classroom expectations.

Class size shaped the effectiveness of these strategies. Smaller classes were generally easier to manage, with little to no disruptive behaviour observed. Larger classes, however, presented challenges, including persistent noise, movement, and occasional disengagement. Despite these constraints, teachers consistently applied strategies to maintain order, using group work, targeted questioning, and careful monitoring to engage learners and sustain attention across varying classroom contexts.

Not all classrooms employed positive behaviour management strategies. A few teachers relied on harsh language or forceful methods to maintain order and manage learner engagement. For example, during a Senior One Physics lesson in Nakapiripirit, one observer noted that the teacher “threatened to beat those who were not focused in the discussions and didn’t want to present.” Such practices undermine learner safety and create a climate of fear rather than engagement.

### ***Teacher-student relationships***

Many observers noted that teachers interacted with learners with politeness, kindness, and patience, and that this attitude was consistently reciprocated. Across classrooms, teacher–learner relationships were marked by respect, warmth, and mutual engagement. Most teachers typically maintained a professional yet approachable demeanour, creating an environment in which learners felt comfortable participating. Observers also highlighted the absence of rough interactions and the frequent demonstration of mutual respect, reinforced by teachers’ consistent efforts to engage learners positively.

Mutual respect was a dominant theme across observed classrooms. In a Senior 1 Geography lesson in Terego, for example, an observer reported,

“Both the teacher and the learners showed mutual respect. The teacher was highly interactive, moving closer to students to show concern and attention, and the learners responded by engaging openly with him and with one another.”

A similar pattern was noted during a Senior 1 Physics lesson in Nakapiripirit, where the teacher was “friendly and patient with the learners, who in turn showed respect and followed her instructions and no rough interactions were observed.”

Respect was also evident in how corrections were made during the lesson. Teachers fostered a culture of valuing everyone’s views, using professional, calm, and patient language. Most responded to questions constructively, corrected misconceptions gently, and maintained a composed approach to discipline. Even when learners made mistakes, such as giving incorrect answers, teachers responded without ridicule. In a Senior 2 English lesson in Madi-Okollo, for instance, “the teacher respected the learners’ ideas, which made them feel comfortable expressing themselves freely and when the answers were incorrect, the teacher corrected them respectfully.” A Senior 1 Christian Religious Education lesson in Terego offered similar evidence as the teacher “treated the learners with respect by valuing their contributions and encouraging them to share their ideas freely and the learners, in turn, responded with equal respect.” Such practices helped every learner feel a sense of belonging and value, contributing to classrooms where learners felt safe and eager to engage.

Observers further noted that these strong teacher–learner relationships supported active participation. Learners were comfortable asking questions, responding to prompts, and contributing to group activities, which promoted both engagement and inclusivity. Even in moments of minor disruption, teachers corrected behaviour gently, maintaining classroom harmony without escalating tension.

Overall, the evidence points to professional, warm, and respectful rapport across the observed classrooms. Teachers employed strategies that emphasized equality, recognition, and responsiveness, cultivating environments where learners felt safe, motivated, and willing to participate. These strong relationships were integral to both effective learning and positive classroom climate.

### ***Conflict resolution within the classroom***

Observed classrooms were largely characterised by an absence of overt disagreements. In most lessons, observers reported no conflict, and teachers frequently modelled or facilitated positive behaviours, including encouraging open communication. The prevailing calm atmosphere was supported by clear expectations and rules, which several teachers introduced at the start of lessons and reinforced throughout. Observers noted that these practices contributed, in part, to mitigating the already infrequent occurrence of conflict in these classrooms.

Alongside maintaining open communication, most teachers created a calm and constructive climate when addressing conflict-related issues. Some emphasised social relationships and encouraged learners to articulate misunderstandings before they escalated. As one observer noted during a Senior 4 Geography lesson in Terego,

“The teacher listened to both sides calmly, addressed the issue fairly, and promoted dialogue to resolve misunderstanding.”

Additionally, structured guidance was also used to address learner disagreements. In some classrooms, behavioural guidance was combined with cultural or moral instruction. Such practices not only resolve immediate concerns but also model respectful communication and strengthen learners’ confidence in managing conflict constructively.

However, not all conflict-handling practices were ideal. In several classrooms, teachers relied on unconventional

or questionable disciplinary measures, most notably threats of punishment, which undermine constructive approaches to conflict management.

Also, in nearly all observed cases of misbehaviour or conflict, teachers led the resolution process. While this reflects commendable responsibility and authority, it often left learners on the sidelines. Limited learner involvement restricts opportunities to develop key social-emotional skills such as empathy, negotiation, accountability, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Although learners may indirectly learn conflict-management strategies by observing their teachers, without opportunities to participate directly through dialogue, peer mediation, or guided reflection, they may struggle to apply these skills independently. This lack of involvement can also foster dependence on teachers to resolve even minor disputes, hindering the development of autonomy and mutual respect among peers. Encouraging learners to engage actively in conflict resolution empowers them and strengthens the classroom community by promoting shared responsibility and emotional intelligence.

### **3.4.2.3 Delivery and presentation**

#### ***Learner participation in classroom activities***

Evidence from secondary school classrooms demonstrated varied forms of learner participation. Teachers often shifted responsibility to learners by employing activities that required active engagement rather than passive listening. Across most observed lessons, efforts to create learner-centred classrooms were evident, with teachers deliberately inviting student participation and valuing multiple voices. Classroom management practices also played a key role in shaping participation. Teachers who adopted an inclusive stance, emphasising that no contribution was invalid, encouraged learners to share openly.

Among the various strategies observed, group work emerged as the most prominent tool for fostering engagement. It provided structured opportunities for interaction, ranging from collaborative assignments to lively classroom games. Teachers frequently paired or grouped students to complete tasks or discuss concepts. For instance, during a Senior 5 Entrepreneurship lesson in Amudat, an observer noted,

“The teacher uses group work by pairing learners. He encouraged them to take charge of the topic.”

Such discussions were often followed by presentations in which group representatives shared their findings with the whole class, demonstrating active participation. These group-based tasks typically generated meaningful engagement, especially when learners were required to defend or explain their ideas, though this occurred only occasionally. Similarly, in a Senior 1 Physics lesson in Nakapiripirit, the teacher “grouped the learners to discuss and later presented their findings, sharing ideas in the process.”

In these settings, learners appeared to take greater ownership of the learning process, working collaboratively before reporting to the class. Sometimes, these presentations stemmed from prior assignments, further extending peer interaction beyond the observed lesson. Activities such as answering questions together, sharing texts, or collectively drawing diagrams created moments of cooperation and mutual support. Teachers intentionally organised such collaborative exercises to encourage interaction. In a Senior 4 Geography class in Terego, for example, “the learners were invited to participate through group discussions and role plays, where they worked in pairs or groups, shared ideas and supported each other during activities.” These strategies not only promoted contribution but also cultivated teamwork and reinforced understanding through peer dialogue.

While group activities were common, their depth varied widely. In many classrooms, teachers facilitated meaningful discussions that encouraged debate and shared task completion. However, in some cases, group work was mechanical—characterised by copying from textbooks or student guides rather than genuine exchange. As one observer in a Senior 2 Physics class in Terego noted,

“When the teacher gave them questions to discuss in groups, learners were seen copying answers from the textbook with no discussion taking place.”

Moreover, in nearly all classrooms observed, group composition often remained static across subjects and lessons rather than being structured around specific learning outcomes, learner abilities, and the desired learning processes. While this consistency fosters familiarity among group members, it restricts opportunities for diverse collaboration and adaptive peer learning. It also suggests a misconception among teachers of grouping as an instructional strategy.

Individual engagement, though less common compared to grouping, was also observed. Teachers called on

students to answer questions or participate in demonstrations, ensuring attentiveness and inclusion. For example, during a Senior 3 Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit, “every learner actively participated as the teacher asked questions and randomly selected students to answer, so every learner was attentive in order to be able to answer the questions asked.” Similarly, learners often engaged in practical tasks such as balancing chemical equations, interpreting diagrams, or measuring angles which reinforced hands-on learning and active cognition.

A few teachers equally invited and encouraged questions from learners, and whenever this happened, teachers demonstrated attentiveness to learners’ questions, responding patiently and using relatable examples to enhance understanding. In a Senior 5 Mathematics class in Nakapiripirit, an observer noted,

“All the learners were invited to participate by at least responding to question. The teacher also gave them time to ask questions and answered using real-life examples.”

Such practices reflected a commitment to responsive pedagogy, balancing teacher guidance with learner autonomy.

Nonetheless, a persistent tension emerged between teacher-led participation and genuine learner agency. While most teachers regularly invited contributions, the rhythm of lessons remained largely teacher-directed. Participation often took the form of chorus responses or reading aloud when prompted, suggesting surface-level engagement with limited inquiry. In many classrooms, learners did not ask questions, sometimes because teachers did not encourage or provide space for them to do so. As one observer in a Senior 2 Agriculture lesson in Yumbe reported,

“Learners did not ask questions because the teacher never asked whether they had any.”

Consequently, participation often relied more on teacher direction than on learner initiative.

Even in classrooms where questioning was encouraged, participation tended to be reactive rather than exploratory. The culture of inquiry, where learners independently seek clarification, was minimal across these classrooms. Additionally, only a few learners consistently asked questions, as seen in a Senior 3 Christian Religious Education lesson in Terego, where “the learners participated by asking questions, though only a small number were observed raising questions and giving explanations.” Similarly, most teachers managed responses centrally, answering each question themselves rather than redirecting discussion to the group. A few exceptions demonstrated more dialogic approaches, where teachers would first present the opportunity of sharing to the wider class, as seen in a Senior 5 Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit, where “the learners asked questions and the teacher bounced them back to the whole class before responding.” Such moments validated curiosity and promoted collective problem-solving.

Overcrowded classrooms also posed a significant impediment to effective delivery, frequently resulting in unequal participation and learning opportunities among students. In such contexts, teachers opted to prioritise a few learners as opposed to the entire class. During teachers’ FGDs, similar reflections emerged, as one female participant in Terego stated,

“There is a challenge with the teacher–learner ratio. The population in some of our classes is so large that, because of the high numbers, you end up involving only some learners while others miss out.”

In conclusion, these findings show that while many secondary school teachers promote participation through group work, questioning, and demonstrations, learner engagement often remains surface-level and teacher-directed. Limited lesson planning and preparation among teachers reduced the effectiveness of these strategies, leading to poorly structured activities and groupings that restricted meaningful interaction. To enhance participatory ideals many teachers are already striving toward, there’s need to strengthen lesson design and preparation.

### ***Use of teaching and learning materials***

Across the classrooms observed, a mixed picture emerged regarding teachers’ use of teaching and learning resources. On one hand, there were instances of resourceful practice in which teachers integrated a variety of instructional aids to enhance learners’ understanding and engagement. On the other hand, there were numerous accounts of lessons conducted without any relevant materials, revealing clear inconsistencies in practice across classrooms and subjects.

In most cases, the materials used were limited to the basics: chalk, blackboard, lesson notes, and textbooks (both learners' and teachers' guides). One observer summarised this pattern during a Senior 1 Physics lesson in Nakapiripirit,

"The only materials the teacher was using were chalk, blackboard, and the lower secondary curriculum textbooks."

This heavy reliance on textbooks appeared consistent across disciplines, with both teachers and students referring to them for lesson content, examples, and exercises.

In a few cases, teachers complemented textbook use with digital tools, such as smartphones, though this was modest and inconsistent. Some educators used their phones to show images or short videos that supported the topic under discussion. As one observer recorded during a Senior 1 Geography lesson in Terego,

"The teacher used textbooks and his phone as learning resources. Students had copies of the textbooks to follow the lesson and make their own notes, meanwhile he used his phone to show pictures."

In such examples, technology served as a bridge between theory and visualisation, helping to clarify abstract concepts and stimulate interest.

Other visual aids and locally available materials—such as charts, manila papers, shea tree seeds, cups, watering cans, glass blocks, dictionaries, religious books, and diagrams—were also observed, though less frequently. Even when these materials were used, they were often few in number compared to class size, limiting student participation. One observer reported during a Senior 1 English lesson in Terego,

"The teacher came with a dictionary which was used during the lesson to find the meaning of vocabularies. Only a few learners were given the dictionary to find out the meaning."

Such examples suggest that while teachers recognise the value of tangible materials, their integration is often minimal and uneven.

Nevertheless, some classrooms demonstrated more active and meaningful learner interaction with teaching aids. For instance, in a Senior 3 Physics lesson in Yumbe, "the learners were able to use the materials to do a practical activity given by the teacher to demonstrate refraction of angles". Similarly, in Mathematics, teachers encouraged the use of geometrical sets and rulers, and some learners were given the opportunity to draw and demonstrate concepts on the chalkboard using the provided materials. These instances represent promising examples of active learning, where students engage cognitively and physically with lesson content rather than remaining passive recipients. They also demonstrate that even simple, locally available resources can make lessons highly interactive and meaningful when teachers are intentional about their use.

However, such interactive use of materials remains relatively rare. In many lessons, no relevant materials were used at all. Teaching in these classrooms often reverted to lecture and note-taking, with learners passively watching the teacher write on the chalkboard or dictate content. One observer noted during a Senior 3 Mathematics lesson in Nabilatuk,

"The teacher did not use any learning resources and aids during his class. With him was a notebook that contained his lesson plan; the learners watched and noted down as he wrote the content on the chalkboard off his head."

Even when instructional tools were available, they were often used solely by the teacher rather than shared with learners. As one observer of a Senior 4 Mathematics lesson in Terego noted,

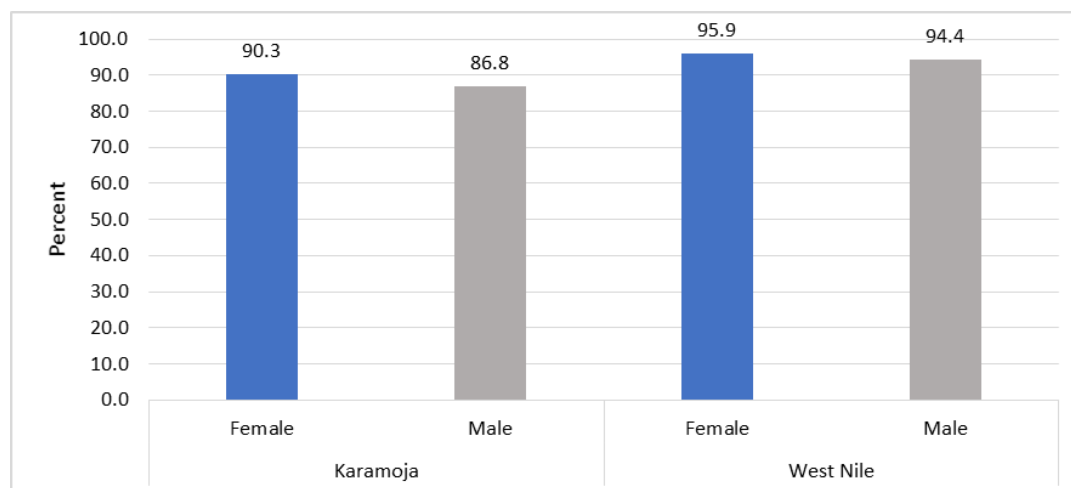
"As the lesson went on, the teacher demonstrated. Learners did not have the chance to practise or use the tools; only the teacher used the tools himself."

These observations point to a strong reliance on textbooks and teacher-led methods, with limited learner interaction or hands-on engagement. While a few teachers demonstrated creativity in using varied and locally available materials, such practices were exceptions rather than the norm. The limited use of diverse teaching aids appears linked, in part, to inadequate preparation and a lack of teacher readiness. These findings highlight the need for targeted professional development to strengthen teachers' capacity to plan for and implement more frequent, creative, and learner-centred use of instructional materials—an essential step toward enriching lesson delivery and deepening students' understanding.

### Integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Survey data from secondary schools revealed widespread access to ICT tools among teachers but limited and uneven integration into actual classroom practice. The majority of survey participants (93.6%) reported having access to ICT tools such as smartphones and computers, with slightly higher access among teachers in West Nile (94.9%) compared to those in Karamoja (87.9%). Access levels were also similar across gender, with 94.9% of females and 93.1% of males reporting access, as illustrated in Figure 11 below:

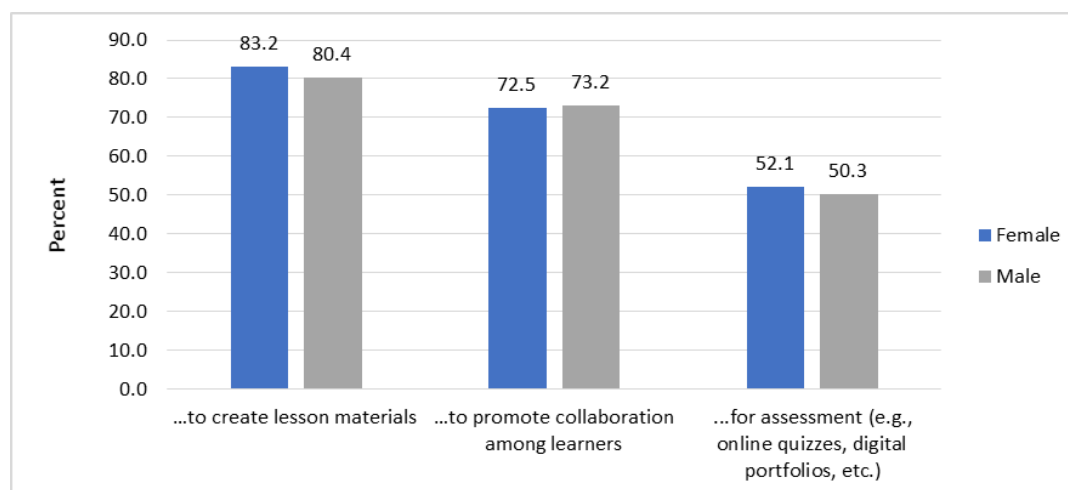
**Figure 11: Self-reported access to ICT tools among secondary school teachers**



A large majority (87.3%) of secondary school survey participants also indicated competence in using online search engines to access educational materials (85.2% of females and 88.2% of males). Among those with ICT access, 92.3% stated that they could find educational resources online—showing minimal gender (89.2% of females and 93.7% of males) or subregional differences (92.0% in Karamoja and 92.3% in West Nile). These findings suggest that most secondary teachers in these areas possess at least a foundational capacity to use ICT for information retrieval.

However, the extent to which teachers apply ICT in their instructional practice varied across different teaching functions. While 81.3% of respondents with ICT access reported using digital tools for lesson preparation and content creation, a lower proportion (73.0%) used technology to promote collaborative learning among students, and only about half (50.9%) used ICT for assessment purposes such as digital quizzes or online assignments. Notably, these patterns were consistent across gender and subregion (see Figure 12 below and Appendix 2). This suggests that although access and basic competence are high, the pedagogical use of ICT remains uneven and somewhat surface-level, with fewer teachers extending digital tools into more interactive or evaluative dimensions of learning.

**Figure 12: Self-reported use of ICT among secondary school teachers**



Classroom observations further contextualised these findings, revealing that meaningful ICT integration remains sporadic and primarily teacher-driven, despite teachers' high self-reported access to and use of ICT in teaching and learning. In many observed lessons, there was little to no evidence of ICT use, even though the curriculum emphasises digital integration. Where technology was employed, it often relied on teachers' personal initiative and devices rather than institutional provision.

Smartphones were the most common tools used—typically to show brief videos, pictures, or examples relevant to lesson content, or to demonstrate data collection methods such as photography. For instance, a teacher of English in a Senior 2 classroom in Nakapiripirit “used a smartphone to demonstrate how to search for material on Google Chrome,” while a teacher of Agriculture in a Senior 1 class in Terego “used digital educational resources like e-books on the smartphone.” During FGDs, some teachers acknowledged that personal devices are currently the only means they can use to achieve some level of ICT integration in their lessons. As one male teacher in Terego noted,

“The curriculum emphasises the use of ICT, but fully implementing it is still challenging. We try using our small smartphones, which is often difficult, so ICT integration remains a major challenge.”

These uses, though commendable, tended to be limited in depth and constrained by the small size and capabilities of a single device. In most cases, the smartphone functioned as a basic visual aid rather than as part of a broader, interactive pedagogical approach. A few teachers, however, demonstrated creativity by blending digital and non-digital teaching and learning resources—for example, showing short video clips before illustrating related diagrams on manila charts. One observer noted during a Senior 1 Chemistry lesson in Terego,

“The teacher brought pictures, showed video clips on his smartphone, and then drew diagrams of what was in the video clip on the manila charts.”

The use of laptops or more advanced ICT tools was rare but notably transformative when present. A handful of teachers used laptops to display educational videos or facilitate online quizzes and research activities, which encouraged learner engagement and inquiry-based learning. However, such instances remained isolated a broader pattern of minimal integration rather than systemic. Moreover, despite this emerging use of technology, the materials remained largely teacher-centred; learners rarely interacted directly with the devices.

These findings portray a system where ICT use in secondary schools is tentative, fragmented, and largely dependent on individual effort rather than institutional support. Teachers' reliance on personal smartphones underscores the absence of adequate school-provided digital infrastructure and the limited integration of ICT into lesson planning and delivery. While the few examples of more advanced ICT use demonstrate strong potential for enhancing learning, these remain exceptions that highlight the need for consistent investment in teacher capacity development, access to functional resources, and clearer pedagogical guidance. Strengthening these areas would allow ICT to evolve beyond sporadic use toward a more purposeful, learner-centred, and integrated part of teaching and learning across secondary schools.

### ***Linking content to learners' contexts and experiences***

The observations revealed a wide range of practices among secondary school teachers in connecting lesson content to learners' everyday experiences. In several classrooms, teachers made deliberate efforts to anchor abstract concepts in familiar, real-world contexts. They engaged students in practical demonstrations that directly linked classroom content to daily activities, intentionally bridging the gap between academic learning and the tangible world learners inhabit. For example, in Amudat, during a Senior 3 Physics lesson on motion, the teacher asked a learner "to come to the front and demonstrate how a motion cycle is started and set in motion," effectively linking a scientific concept to a lived experience.

Similarly, in a Senior 2 Physics lesson in Madi-Okollo, a teacher poured water into a cup held by a student to illustrate how pressure builds, remarking,

"This is the same pressure you feel when holding a full jerrycan."

Through such relatable demonstrations, complex scientific ideas were translated into meaningful, familiar experiences. A strong pattern emerged in which teachers contextualised lessons through familiar surroundings and relatable examples. Many intentionally drew from learners' environments, homes, schools, and communities, connecting classroom content to common practices. For instance, in a Senior 3 Mathematics class in Nakapiripirit, "the teacher explained the use of geometry and measurement in everyday life, such as in designing buildings and playgrounds." This approach not only familiarised abstract mathematical concepts but also highlighted their practical relevance to learners' future vocations and local settings.

Similarly, a Senior 1 Agriculture teacher in Yumbe linked agricultural safety to students' home activities, asking if they owned protective gear for gardening and emphasizing adherence to safety practices. As one observer noted,

"The teacher asked whether the learners had personal protective equipment such as overalls, gumboots, and face gears, at home for use in the garden. The teacher encouraged them to always wear these gears while working in the garden."

Such efforts exemplify how lessons can meaningfully connect with students' lived routines and responsibilities. This localisation also extended into cultural contexts, where teachers incorporated examples rooted in local realities. In a Senior 5 Geography lesson in Yumbe, a teacher linked afforestation to visible environmental benefits, urging students to participate in reforestation "since it leads to rain formation," thus connecting global environmental issues to local survival needs. Likewise, in Madi-Okollo, a Senior 1 History teacher related the topic of migration to the learners' own family histories by explaining "how the learners' families migrated and settled in their current locations," and encouraging reflection on social relationships and cultural identity.

Occasionally, a few teachers went further by inviting learners to contribute their own perspectives. They encouraged reflections on community meetings, family migration stories, and market activities or on routine household tasks. In one Senior 5 Mathematics classroom in Nakapiripirit, "after learning the concept, students reflected on how it applied to their lives and shared their thoughts with the class." These participatory strategies promoted deeper understanding and fostered a sense of ownership over the learning process.

However, the observations also revealed inconsistencies. In many classrooms, "no connection of the content to the learners' everyday life experience was observed." Teachers often relied heavily on guides or dictation, leaving lessons abstract and detached from reality. Even when attempts were made, some connections were superficial. This suggests that while the intention to contextualise learning exists, not all teachers possess the strategies or contextual awareness to implement it effectively.

The contrast between effective and limited practice is striking. Ideally, content should flow naturally into learners' lived environments, with teachers deliberately drawing on learners' languages, household activities, community life, and cultural practices to enrich instruction. While several teachers exemplify this approach vividly, a gap remains: many lessons continue to feel disconnected from students' social and cultural contexts. This highlights an ongoing need for consistent, intentional integration of experiential and contextual learning across all subjects.

### 3.4.2.4 Assessment and Evaluation

#### *Forms of assessment*

During the observed secondary school lessons, teachers employed a wide range of assessment strategies to gauge student understanding and engagement. Most consistently integrated formative assessments that targeted both individual and group participation, using a combination of oral, written, observational, and peer-based methods. These assessments were embedded within the learning process, reflecting a commitment to responsive and interactive instruction. In some classrooms, teachers adopted integrated assessment approaches that provided a more comprehensive picture of learners' abilities. Continuous monitoring was also evident, as teachers tracked students' progress and understanding through observation and ongoing interactive activities.

Questioning emerged as one of the most dominant strategies teachers used to drive instruction, check comprehension, and sustain engagement. The type and quality of questions varied—ranging from simple recall and confirmation to more thoughtful prompts that invited reflection, reasoning, and application. Students were often called upon to answer at the chalkboard, individually or in groups, enabling teachers to assess understanding in real time. In some cases, these exchanges developed into broader class discussions that fostered shared learning. For instance, during a Senior 5 Entrepreneurship lesson in Amudat, “the teacher used classroom discussions and quizzes,” ensuring that learners remained actively engaged throughout.

In most classrooms, a large proportion of questions were recall-based, focusing on definitions, facts, and procedural knowledge. For example, in an English language lesson, the teacher asked, “What is a paragraph?” and “Define the terms rough and fair copy as used in summary writing.” Similarly, in a Christian Religious Education lesson, students were asked, “Who is an apostle?” and “Who is a disciple?” Such questions effectively reinforced key concepts and factual understanding but offered limited opportunities for deeper reasoning or application beyond the classroom.

Alongside recall questions, teachers frequently used short, closed-ended prompts to check attentiveness and comprehension in real time—phrases such as “Are we together?”, “Have you understood?” and “Is there anyone who has not picked anything?” These served as quick diagnostic checks but typically required brief “yes” or “no” responses, limiting opportunities for elaboration or exploration.

In a few classrooms, teachers went beyond surface-level comprehension, asking learners to explain ideas, reason through problems, or apply concepts. For example, in a Senior 3 Christian Religious Education lesson in Terego, a teacher asked,

“Explain how the above project in the textbook has contributed to development of society by Christians.”

Others used well-crafted, scenario-based questions that encouraged learners to relate classroom knowledge to real-life situations. Though less common, these open-ended prompts demanded higher-order thinking and transformed lessons into interactive exchanges where learners became co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients.

However, not all open-ended questions achieved this depth. Many still focused on recalling previously taught material. For instance, during a Senior 3 Mathematics lesson in Nabilatuk, the teacher asked,

“Two lines are said to be parallel. Why?” and “If the two lines do not meet and they are running in the same or different direction, what are they called?”—questions that mainly tested factual recall.

Learner involvement in questioning varied considerably. In most classrooms, teachers dominated both the questioning and responding processes. Yet in some, learners were encouraged to seek clarification and engage reciprocally. During a Senior 3 Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit, an observer noted,

“The learners asked questions, where they did not understand and the teacher responded with respect, explaining concepts again if the class did not understand.”

Similarly, in a Senior 3 Entrepreneurship lesson in Madi-Okollo, “after each explanation, the teacher checked the learners' comprehension by asking follow-up and probing questions that encouraged deeper reflection. Learners were equally encouraged to raise questions whenever they needed further clarification.”

In such classrooms, learners' curiosity and need for clarification were valued as part of the learning process. Questioning thus functioned as a two-way exchange—teachers probing for understanding and learners seeking clarity or challenging ideas. In some instances, learners' questions revealed genuine engagement. However, this

reciprocity was not universal. In several lessons, observers noted that “the learners were not given a chance to ask questions,” while in others, even when invited, “the learners did not ask any questions.” This silence often reflected a classroom culture where questioning is not yet normalised, or where hesitation and limited confidence suppressed participation. Some teachers attempted to address this by creating alternative channels for expression; for instance, during a Senior One Mathematics lesson, the teacher “encouraged shy learners to write questions on paper.”

Group work emerged as another dominant form of formative assessment, frequently employed by teachers to foster collaboration and gauge learners’ comprehension. Through these activities, learners collaborated on discussions and problem-solving exercises before presenting their findings for feedback. This approach fostered peer learning and allowed teachers to gauge both individual understanding and group dynamics. For instance, during a Senior 3 Chemistry lesson in Terego, the observer noted,

“The teacher gave exercises in groups, then in each group there was a group leader who presented.”

Such arrangements enabled the teacher to observe collaboration and leadership among learners. Peer discussions also created a supportive environment where students felt comfortable sharing ideas and learning from one another before turning to the teacher for clarification.

Although less common, peer-to-peer evaluation was integrated into lessons. Students were encouraged to review and correct each other’s work, deepening conceptual understanding while enabling the teacher to identify gaps in knowledge. During a Senior 1 Chemistry lesson in Yumbe, for example, “when learners asked questions, the teacher first allowed their peers to respond and if a learner gave an incorrect answer, the teacher invited other students to offer corrections or alternative perspectives.” These exchanges fostered a safe environment for learners to express themselves and accept constructive feedback. These instances demonstrate incorporation of participatory assessment practices, though they remained less widespread.

Alongside group-based assessments, teachers frequently used individual exercises to measure independent understanding. These were administered during lessons or as homework, with teachers often moving around the classroom to check and mark responses. One observer reported from a Senior 2 Physics lesson in Terego that “the teacher provided learners with in-class exercises to check their understanding and also assigned homework to be completed individually.” Similarly, in a Senior 3 Mathematics lesson in Nabilatuk, the teacher “conducted individual testing by writing questions on the chalkboard and encouraging students to answer them in their notebooks while he moved around the classroom to provide guidance and mark their work.”

At a broader level, summative assessments were also integral to the teaching process. End-of-topic exercises, mid-term, and end-of-term examinations provided structured measures of cumulative learning. These were often complemented by ongoing formative feedback, ensuring that learners received timely guidance to improve performance and understanding.

However, not all classrooms demonstrated active or varied assessment practices. Some relied heavily on questioning without structured tasks, while others showed limited engagement with assessment altogether. As one observer noted during a Senior 4 Physics lesson in Terego,

“The teacher just kept asking questions in the course of the lesson.”

This suggests limited diversity in assessment strategies. Such inconsistencies highlight the need for more intentional assessment planning to ensure that learning outcomes are consistently addressed.

Furthermore, although oral presentations provided opportunities to assess broader skills such as confidence and communication, most teachers focused primarily on content rather than these broader competences. Despite these gaps, the overall observations suggest that many teachers understand assessment as a tool for learning rather than simply for evaluation. The combined use of group and individual tasks provided a more comprehensive picture of learners’ progress, enabling teachers to identify both group dynamics and individual mastery while adjusting instruction to address learning needs.

### ***Handling and use of assessment results***

Across most observed classrooms, teachers used assessment as an integral part of instruction to check learners’ understanding, monitor progress, and inform teaching decisions. In many cases, assessment results were employed to identify learning gaps, adjust teaching approaches, and plan remedial support. Teachers frequently used immediate corrections to reinforce learning and guide instructional adjustments. For example, during a Senior 3 Chemistry lesson in Terego, the teacher “used the assessment results to check the learners’

performance and those who did not perform well were corrected immediately and given extra work.” This demonstrates the formative use of assessments to adapt instruction in real time.

Assessment feedback was also used to motivate learners and encourage greater participation. In a Senior 1 Physics lesson in Nakapiripirit, one teacher reflected on limited class involvement, “remarking to the class during presentations that it was always the same faces she saw presenting.” Such reflective feedback was intended to promote wider engagement and self-improvement among learners.

Record keeping featured prominently across classrooms, though with varying levels of consistency and formality. All teachers maintained continuous assessment records drawn from end-of-topic or end-of-term assessments. These records were kept in various formats, including performance books, student folders, and computer files. As one observer noted during a Senior 2 Biology lesson in Yumbe,

“Each learner has a file for recording performance, classroom participation, and examination scores, maintained in both hard and soft copies. A duplicate record is also kept by the Director of Studies.”

Similarly, in a Senior 3 Mathematics lesson in Nabilatuk, the teacher “recorded and kept cumulative results from end-of-topic assessments, which contributed up to 20% of the end-of-cycle examinations.” These records were also used for reference when meeting with students’ parents.”

This structured approach to record keeping was largely driven by administrative requirements for promotion, parent reporting, and preparation for national examinations. For most secondary teachers, assessment results—particularly those from activities of integration assessments—were centralised with the head of academics or the Director of Studies. These records primarily served grading and accountability purposes linked to the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEBC) requirements, rather than being used systematically to track learners’ progress.

In contrast, only a few teachers extended record keeping to classroom-based or informal assessments. While many teachers assessed learners during or after lessons, most did not keep records of these ongoing evaluations. A few exceptions demonstrated more reflective use of assessment information. For instance, an observer during a Senior Three Physics lesson in Amudat noted that “the teacher used assessment results to identify gaps for improvement in both learners and his own teaching. He also kept records of learners’ performance to monitor their progress over time.”

Overall, apart from the mandatory documentation required for UNEBC reporting, inconsistencies in the handling and use of assessment records were widespread among secondary teachers. While assessments were routinely used to check understanding, the lack of systematic record keeping limited opportunities for continuous tracking of learner progress and evidence-based instructional improvement.

### **3.4.2.5 Inclusion and gender sensitivity**

Promoting inclusivity and gender sensitivity in classrooms is fundamental to ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all students. The classroom observations across different secondary schools revealed how teachers approach these critical dimensions, highlighting examples of effective practice, as well as areas requiring attention.

#### ***Learners with disabilities***

During classroom observations, the participation of learners with disabilities was generally characterised by inclusion, attentive teaching, and deliberate strategies to promote equality. While many classrooms did not have learners with disabilities, in the few cases where such learners were present, teachers demonstrated awareness and sensitivity toward their needs. These instances reflected not just accommodation, but a conscious effort to create learning environments where learners with disabilities could thrive alongside their peers.

In these classrooms, teachers ensured that learners with disabilities were meaningfully integrated into the class community rather than isolated. They received equal attention and opportunities to participate in lesson activities, creating an environment that supported full engagement. For example, during a Senior 1 Geography lesson in Nabilatuk, an observer noted,

“All the learners were treated equally, with no discrimination. Students with disabilities received the same attention and opportunities to express their opinions and respond to questions as their peers.”

This reflects a clear effort to foster inclusion not merely through physical presence but through active engagement in learning.

Teachers also made thoughtful adjustments to meet the learners' physical or sensory needs. This included modifying seating arrangements and enlarging chalkboard writing to ensure accessibility. In a Senior 2 Biology class in Yumbe, a "short-sighted learner was seated at the front, and the teacher wrote in larger letters to facilitate visibility." Similarly, during a Senior 1 Biology lesson in Yumbe, an observer noted:

"The teacher adjusted seating arrangements to provide favourable positions for learners with disabilities, such as those with visual impairments, mobility challenges, or hearing difficulties. They were given sufficient time and appropriate instructional materials, ensuring all learners had equal opportunities to participate."

Participation extended to collaborative and hands-on activities as well. Learners with disabilities were actively engaged in group work, demonstrations, and presentations. During a Senior 2 Physics lesson in Terego, the teacher "invited a boy and a girl with disabilities to demonstrate how pressure is exerted from a bottle in front of the class." This act was not merely symbolic; it reflected a commitment to inclusive pedagogy where differences in ability did not limit engagement.

Across observations, classroom interactions were open and supportive. Teachers fostered cooperation among learners, encouraging peers to assist one another. In classrooms with learners with disabilities, peer support emerged as a key strategy to enhance inclusion. Thoughtful accommodations, equal participation opportunities, and a culture of respect and cooperation were evident.

### ***Catering to different learning needs***

Classroom observations revealed varying levels of teacher awareness and responsiveness to learners with diverse learning needs. Some teachers demonstrated strong sensitivity and deliberate efforts to accommodate individual differences, while in other classrooms, awareness appeared limited or inconsistent.

In many classrooms, teachers made deliberate and thoughtful adjustments to better support learners who required additional assistance. They refined their instructional approaches, ensuring that explanations were clearer, more accessible, and effective for all learners. One observer highlighted during a Senior 3 Mathematics class in Nakapiripirit,

"The teacher demonstrated a strong understanding of his learners, taking the time to re-explain concepts to ensure slow learners grasped them. He gave special attention to individual students, asking questions to check their understanding and providing further explanations when needed."

This willingness to reteach and check understanding reflected a caring, patient approach that met learners at their individual levels. Additionally, some teachers differentiated both the pace of instruction and the tasks assigned, deliberately slowing down or revisiting explanations when needed and planning alternative activities or questions to support diverse learning needs. For instance, a Senior 1 English teacher in Terego "slowed down lessons and encouraged learners to wait for peers to complete assignments, ensuring that slower learners could participate fully." Likewise, in a Senior 3 Christian Religious Education lesson in Terego, the teacher "adapted assignments and questions to meet individual learning needs. These adjustments reflected awareness of diverse learning speeds and abilities."

Peer support and group arrangements also contributed to inclusivity. Teachers often paired or grouped learners with learning difficulties alongside higher-performing peers to provide support. For example, during a Senior 3 Chemistry lesson in Terego, "the teacher ensured that learners with special needs were included in groups with high and average-performing students to provide additional support and within these groups, they were also given leadership responsibilities." This strategy not only encouraged peer learning but also created an inclusive classroom atmosphere where learners supported one another.

However, not all classrooms consistently applied these strategies. In some cases, teachers focused primarily on more active students or assumed all learners had similar abilities, resulting in lessons that did not explicitly address diverse learning needs. In essence, while some teachers exemplified inclusive practices, others showed gaps that highlighted the need for more deliberate strategies to cater to all learners.

### ***Gender inclusivity***

The findings highlight a general commitment to gender equality and balance in classroom participation. Most

teachers demonstrated awareness of the importance of gender inclusivity by deliberately ensuring both boys and girls were actively engaged in learning activities, shared leadership roles, and collaborated freely in mixed-gender groups.

In many of the observed classes, the practice of equal participation in lesson activities was prevalent, clear and deliberate. This sense of fairness was emphasised through structured opportunities for boys and girls to ask or answer questions and lead activities. During a Senior 2 Physics lesson in Terego, an observer noted,

“The teacher made sure that after a boy participated, a girl would also participate, which balanced their involvement in the lesson.”

Similarly, in a Senior 3 Mathematics lesson in Nakapiripirit, “there was equal participation from both boys and girls, whereby they actively asked and answered questions, with no gender bias observed.” Such conscious balancing reflected an effort to create equitable classroom dynamics.

Grouping learners to ensure a mix of boys and girls emerged as a common strategy to support gender inclusion. In all observed classrooms, boys and girls were integrated within the same, often fixed, groups across subjects and lessons, working collaboratively on tasks. This structure fostered cross-gender interaction, mutual respect, and equitable participation. As one observer in a Senior 3 class in Yumbe noted,

“Boys and girls were grouped together and actively participated in the activities. The teacher guided and monitored each group to ensure equal participation among all learners.”

Teachers further reinforced inclusivity by intentionally balancing leadership roles within groups. Both boys and girls were given opportunities to serve as chairpersons or secretaries, and presentation duties were equitably distributed. For instance, in a Senior 2 Physics lesson in Madi-Okollo, the teacher “ensured equal opportunities for boys and girls to lead discussions and make presentations.” The observer further remarked,

“Group leadership was considered gender-balanced, including in group formation.”

Such practices reflected the teachers’ awareness that leadership experience contributes to building confidence and agency among learners.

Several teachers also demonstrated attentiveness to participation dynamics, intervening when one gender was underrepresented. In a Senior 2 Physics lesson in Nakapiripirit, when boys dominated the first two presentations, the teacher “deliberately asked a girl to present in the third group.” Similarly, during a Senior 2 Biology lesson in Yumbe, a teacher “noticed limited female participation and encouraged girls to come forward and write their answers on the blackboard”. These actions illustrate the teachers’ proactive efforts to promote gender balance.

However, not all classrooms demonstrated such attentiveness. Some observations revealed imbalances where one gender dominated participation and teachers did not intervene to ensure inclusion. In these instances, efforts to challenge traditional gender norms were minimal, suggesting that while fairness was generally maintained, deeper discussions about gender roles and stereotypes were largely absent. For example, during a Senior 2 English lesson in Madi-Okollo, an observer reported that “the teacher allowed more boys than girls to answer questions and make presentations during group work and throughout the lesson, only one girl was given a chance to participate.”

Relatedly, in a few cases, subtle gender stereotypes persisted within group dynamics. At times, teachers inadvertently reinforced gender stereotypes by using examples that focused on one gender or by overlooking gender-based biases and misconceptions that emerged among learners. For instance, despite teachers’ encouragement for balanced leadership, girls were often assigned secretarial roles, justified by remarks from peers such as “you have a better handwriting” or “you’re neat.” Boys, meanwhile, tended to assume chairperson or moderator roles. In a Senior 2 English lesson in Nakapiripirit, one observer noted,

“While the teacher engaged learners in group presentations and reading activities, some boys told the girls to be secretaries because they write well, while the boys took up the role of moderators.”

A similar pattern appeared in a Senior One Physics lesson in Madi-Okollo, as highlighted below,

“The teacher divided the class into smaller groups to encourage equal participation among learners. However, in most groups, the boys wanted to take the lead while the girls were assigned the role of secretary. The teacher did not pay attention to this.”

Although these instances may seem minor, they reinforce gender stereotypes that shape learners' perceptions of appropriate roles. Repeatedly assigning girls supportive roles can lead them to view leadership as a male domain, while boys may equate authority with their gender. Over time, such patterns normalise unequal role distribution and undermine efforts to build learners' confidence, aspirations, and agency across genders.

Overall, classroom observations indicated that most teachers made deliberate efforts to balance participation and foster respect between boys and girls. While gender biases persisted in some cases, the consistent emphasis on equitable participation reflects meaningful steps toward gender-responsive learning environments.

### 3.5 CURRICULUM PRACTICES

***Objective: To establish teachers' understanding of the curriculum and how it informs teachers' practices.***

Understanding the curriculum is fundamental to effective teaching, as it shapes the decisions teachers make in planning, instruction, and assessment. Through classroom observations, teachers' FGDs and headteachers' IDIs, the study aimed to explore teachers' comprehension of the curriculum and examine the ways in which this understanding influences their everyday classroom practices. By investigating how teachers interpret curricular expectations and translate them into meaningful learning experiences, insight into the relationship between curriculum knowledge and instructional effectiveness. This inquiry ultimately highlights the critical role of curricular literacy in promoting high-quality teaching and student learning.

#### 3.5.1 Findings at primary school level

During the FGDs, most teachers demonstrated a commendable understanding of the primary school thematic curriculum and its requirements. They recognised that the curriculum emphasises the development of competences among learners, highlighting key competences, life skills, and values, and promoting practical learning alongside theoretical knowledge. Teachers showed awareness of the curriculum content, including teaching methods, the use of instructional materials, learning objectives, reference books, and the allocation of periods for each theme.

From the various discussions across all study districts, it was evident that teachers viewed the curriculum as a critical guide for lesson preparation and classroom implementation. A female teacher in Terego explained,

"The lesson plan I prepare must align with the curriculum. The skills I intend to teach should correspond to what the curriculum requires, and the knowledge and methodologies I use must also be consistent with the curriculum's expectations."

Similarly, a female teacher in Nabilatuk noted,

"In the curriculum, we have clear indicators for life skills and values such as effective communication, creative thinking, love, care, and cooperation. These indicators guide the methods we use and help us understand how to approach the content we are teaching. The curriculum also specifies the topics to be covered, because you cannot develop or teach competencies without first knowing the exact topic you are expected to handle or break down for learners."

Teachers also demonstrated an understanding of curriculum-guided assessment practices. They highlighted the importance of assessing whether learners have achieved specific competences and documenting these achievements while providing constructive feedback. A female teacher in Amudat explained,

"I came to understand that when we are teaching and assessing children, we must give meaningful feedback on their work. When marking assessments, we are expected to write comments such as 'very good, keep it up' or 'work harder next time,' depending on the child's performance. Even for a learner who has not done well, we should give specific feedback rather than simply telling them to do corrections. Everything must be clearly written so that each child receives guidance that helps them improve."

Classroom observations confirmed that teachers implemented varied assessment methods, including oral questioning, classroom assignments, marking books, and observing group work. Immediate feedback, through both appreciation and corrective guidance, was consistently provided in line with curriculum expectations across most classrooms.

Headteachers' interviews also revealed presence of structured processes to support teachers' understanding

of the curriculum. In some schools, teachers' understanding of the curriculum was reinforced through peer mentorship and structured support.

A Headteacher in Nabilatuk said,

"We have an academic committee in place, and teachers meet according to their subject allocations to break down the curriculum for each term. Within these groups, they develop their schemes of work." Continuous professional development, including workshops organised by center coordinating tutors (CCTs) and district authorities, also supported curriculum understanding."

As one headteacher in Amudat noted,

"Most of the time, the centre coordinating tutors and the district organise refresher courses. When a few teachers attend these courses, they are expected to roll down the information to the rest of the staff. Through this process, the entire team gets updated on the curriculum."

Despite these efforts, gaps in curriculum understanding were observed and reported. Though the curriculum emphasises the cumulative documentation of learners' performance records, classroom observations revealed inconsistencies in teachers' practices. Across most classrooms, teachers did not have learners' records of performance and equally did not document the assessments conducted during the observed lessons. This shows a gap between professed understanding of the curriculum and actual classroom implementation, depriving teachers an opportunity of tracking learners' progress and designing appropriate interventions.

Teachers highlighted challenges interpreting the curriculum, often needing additional guidance to implement it effectively. A female teacher in Amudat shared,

"Interpreting the curriculum is challenging. At times, it feels like we need a specialist to guide us. There are elements in the curriculum that we need someone to explain before we can teach them effectively."

A male teacher in Amudat elaborated during another discussion,

"One of the main challenges I face is interpreting the curriculum. Although I have attended training on the competency-based curriculum, I still struggle to understand it, and this remains one of the biggest challenges I face as a teacher. I understand parts of it, but not enough. I need more guidance and repeated training to fully grasp what is expected."

Several teachers also highlighted systemic challenges that affect curriculum implementation, including the lack of refresher training following curriculum changes, limited access to curriculum copies. A female teacher in Yumbe noted,

"The government changed the curriculum without providing refresher courses for most teachers. Whenever there is a curriculum change, teachers need to be trained on how to implement it effectively."

In another discussion, a male teacher in Terego added,

"The curriculum copies distributed years ago are no longer available in the school, leaving teachers to rely solely on textbooks without access to the actual curriculum."

Additionally, outdated or misaligned textbooks further complicate successful curriculum implementation as teachers struggle to develop lessons aligned to the curriculum expectations. Similarly, the absence of reference books in some schools limits the teachers' ability to deliver lessons effectively. A female teacher in Terego said,

"In my English class, I do not have a reference book. I have been relying only on the curriculum, and the absence of a proper reference book has made it difficult for me to fully enjoy teaching."

Another male teacher in Terego stated,

"Sometimes these books [textbooks] are not aligned with the curriculum. When teaching, you may compare the book with the curriculum and realise that the content does not fully match. This creates inconsistencies in the teaching and learning."

Language of instruction also posed challenges. Although the curriculum specifies local or familiar language for Primary 1 to Primary 3, teachers who do not speak the learners' language face difficulties in instruction. A male teacher in Nakapiripirit shared,

“When the thematic curriculum was introduced, we were told that learners in P1 to P3 should be taught using the local language. However, teachers are sometimes posted from places like Soroti or Lira and may not speak the children’s local language, yet they are still expected to teach these classes. As a result, teachers struggle to deliver lessons effectively, and learners struggle to understand what is being taught.”

In refugee settlement schools with multilingual learners, the challenge is compounded, especially when handling learners from other contexts. This reflects a challenge among teachers in effectively implementing the curriculum within multilingual classrooms. A female teacher in Yumbe stated,

“Though Primary 1 to Primary 3 learners are supposed to be taught in the local language, in a settlement school like this one, all learners are taught in English due to the diversity of languages spoken. This becomes a major challenge for children who transfer from schools where teaching is done in the local language, as they struggle to adapt to lessons delivered entirely in English.”

When a teacher lacks the necessary vocabulary in the language of instruction, their explanations may be unclear, making it harder for learners to understand the concepts. Headteachers echoed these challenges, emphasising the difficulty of allocating teachers to lower classes and ensuring effective instruction in local languages. A Headteacher in Nabilatuk explained,

“Many teachers are not able to express themselves well in the local language. When assigning duties and allocating subjects, we often need teachers to handle Primary 1 or Primary 2 classes, where the curriculum requires instruction in the local language. This sometimes forces us to overload the few teachers who are fluent or let some teachers use English instead. Some subjects require a mix of both languages, introducing a concept in English and then repeating it in the local language.”

Challenges in assessment practices were also noted with teachers’ reflections highlighting misconceptions. It emerged that in some schools, teaching and assessment in Primary 1 to Primary 3 were conducted in different languages, as a female teacher in Yumbe highlighted,

“We are expected to teach lower classes using the local language, but when learners move into transitional classes, they struggle with English. Additionally, although teaching is done in the local language, exams are set in English. This creates a lot of confusion for both teachers and learners.”

This reveals a gap between curriculum specifications which state that in the event instruction in the lower classes is conducted in a local or familiar language, all assessments, except in English subject, should be administered in that local language. While assessing learners in a language contrary to that used during instruction and they understand, it deprives them the ability to demonstrate their learning effectively.

### **3.5.2 Findings at secondary school level**

From the teachers’ FGDs across the study locations, a clear pattern emerged as most participants demonstrated theoretical understanding of the curriculum they are implementing and its key emphases. They spoke about it with familiarity and conviction, recognising its shift toward a competence-based approach—one that goes beyond memorising content to nurturing skills, values, and attitudes. They referenced core curriculum components such as subjects, instructional strategies, generic skills, learning outcomes, and assessment frameworks. One male teacher in Nakapiripirit summed this understanding clearly when he explained,

“The curriculum includes well-defined learning outcomes and subject-matter content. It outlines instructional strategies, provides assessment tools, and incorporates differentiation strategies to accommodate diverse learning abilities and styles. Additionally, it promotes the integration of key skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, communication, and creativity. It embraces materials and teaching methods that reflect and honour diverse cultures, and it requires the effective integration of technology.”

Teachers also emphasised their evolved role in the learning process. Many described the curriculum as one that places learners at the centre, with teachers acting as facilitators rather than directors. A female participant in Nabilatuk reflected this shift well,

“Another aspect of the new curriculum is that it is learner-centred, unlike the old curriculum which was teacher-centred. There are activities designed for learners to carry out in class while the teacher takes on the role of a facilitator.”

In implementing the curriculum, teachers frequently highlighted key curriculum documents that guide classroom instruction, emphasising their importance for effective lesson delivery. As one male participant in an FGD in Nabilatuk noted,

“We also have the schemes of work and lesson plans as core components of the curriculum because they help the teacher prepare and organise the lesson. As a facilitator, he or she must have both.”

Headteachers during their interviews reported supporting teachers’ understanding of the curriculum, showing that curriculum orientation was not left to one off training by the NCDC. Most schools intentionally invested in helping teachers grasp what is expected of them, largely through internal professional development workshops and structured mentorship. Headteachers also encouraged attendance in external trainings whenever opportunities arose. One headteacher in Nabilatuk noted,

“We’ve held school-based workshops and supported teachers in external ones.” In Yumbe, another headteacher described a culture of shared learning and peer support. We organise continuous professional development trainings, sometimes bringing in external specialists—especially for the lower secondary curriculum. We also send teachers for external trainings, and they return to share what they have learned. In addition, we hold departmental meetings to address implementation challenges and provide mentorship, where experienced and knowledgeable teachers guide those who have weaknesses.”

This support was also acknowledged by teachers themselves, including one in Yumbe who remarked,

“The school takes responsibility for professional development by organising workshops. They invite resource persons to guide us on the changes in the new curriculum and how we can cope with them.”

Across the West Nile districts, both teachers and Headteachers also reported receiving capacity building on curriculum implementation from development partners, notably Enabel. Despite this strong foundation of understanding and support mechanisms, gaps in implementation practices were realised. Teachers frequently highlighted curriculum documents such as lesson plans and schemes of work as essential guides for classroom instruction. Yet classroom observations revealed that this belief did not consistently shape practice. Slightly over a half of the teachers observed (52.5% of 40) had both lesson plans and schemes of work, and 27.5% lacked both entirely.

Either way lessons still happened but without the deliberate scaffolding needed to develop competencies. Teachers leaned heavily on textbooks and teacher guides, and some reverted to traditional note-dictation, leaving learners as passive recipients rather than active participants. These approaches undermine the spirit and success of the competence-based curriculum.

When teachers spoke about why planning was slipping, their reasons were human and relatable. They pointed to the overload caused by handling multiple classes, suggesting the issue partly stemmed from workload pressures rather than resistance. One teacher in Madi-Okollo admitted with frustration,

“I cannot prepare lesson plans and schemes of work for all classes from Senior 1 to Senior 5; I can manage only two classes effectively.”

Another teacher in Nabilatuk described a familiar story across many schools,

“Some teachers have overwhelming responsibilities, with 30–40 periods a week. For example, we have only one Agriculture teacher from Senior One to Senior Six who also has other duties. Such overload makes proper lesson preparation difficult, and teachers often move from one lesson to another without any time to rest, which ultimately affects lesson delivery.”

Headteachers’ reflections reinforced the same concern, with one in Terego noting,

“Teachers have 32–40 periods a week, leaving no time for research.”

These workloads far exceed the Ministry of Education and Sports’ recommended 18 to 24 lessons per week (40 minutes each), placing teachers under intense time pressure. And when professionals are stretched too thin, even the best training cannot fully translate into practice. Ultimately, high workloads not only weaken curriculum implementation, but also erode teacher well-being and job satisfaction.

Many teachers and headteachers openly admitted that understanding of the curriculum is uneven. The gaps were voiced with frustration, honesty, and a sense of being left behind. A headteacher in Nabilatuk said,

“There is a gap between how the syllabus and the curriculum are interpreted. Despite efforts, many still do not understand what the curriculum is or how it should be implemented.”

Teachers themselves echoed the same reality during discussions. Several described feeling uncertain about their practice, especially when planning lessons and designing assessments that truly reflect the competence-based philosophy. One male teacher in Nabilatuk, speaking during a focus group discussion, shared,

“Personally, I have not received enough training on it [curriculum]. Though I’m sorry to admit this, I sometimes doubt whether I’m doing the right thing or the wrong thing. I struggle with designing assessments and evaluating learners in ways that align with the new curriculum.”

Much of this confusion traces back to the curriculum rollout model. Under the NCDC cascading approach, only a few teachers per school received formal training and were expected to relay that learning to others. In many schools, that relay never happened or at least not in the depth or structure envisioned. One female participant observed,

“Four years down the road, some teachers have still never been trained or retooled in this curriculum.”

This aligns with the perception that to date; some teachers continue to implement the curriculum primarily employing phased out approaches. A male participant in Nakapiripirit noted,

“It’s unfortunate that we are being asked to teach what we don’t know. The NCDC should have first properly retooled teachers on what is expected of them. The curriculum is good, but its practice is becoming a challenge.”

Others reiterated the same need for wider, direct teacher support. A male teacher in Amudat noted,

“Many still lean on the methods of the old phased-out curriculum, not by preference but by default. Not all teachers have been retrained on the new curriculum. Often, only a few were invited to workshops or training sessions, while the majority stayed behind. As a result, many teachers rely on their knowledge of the old curriculum. More widespread training and workshops are needed to ensure all teachers are equipped to implement the new curriculum effectively.”

Teachers’ reflections revealed that the struggle does not stop in schools but it begins earlier. They pointed to misalignment between training at teacher preparation institutions and the expectations of the curriculum. While the new framework emphasises learner-centred facilitation and higher-order competence building, university training still largely mirrors traditional lecture-based instruction. A female teacher in Yumbe explained this when she said,

“Many teachers who are trained under a different system now find it difficult to adapt to the new approach. Coping with these changes requires teachers to be refreshed and retrained.”

Another female participant in Nakapiripirit explained,

“This new curriculum is implemented more at the lower secondary level, yet it should have started right from the university. At campus you study something else—you attend lectures, sit, and listen. But when you come into the real field, it’s completely different. There’s no alignment between what you study at university and what you’re expected to do in practice. You have to first sit down, understand how things work, and then try to adapt. If you’re not quick to learn, you end up teaching the old curriculum.”

Misinterpretations were most visible around assessment. Some teachers demonstrated misunderstanding on how school-based continuous assessment contributes to the end of cycle learner grades. One female participant in Nabilatuk remarked,

“By the end of the four years, the school contributes 30% of the final marks, while UNEB contributes the remaining 70%.”

This contradicts the curriculum’s true continuous assessment design, in which scores accumulated from Senior One onward contribute 20% of the final grade, while UNEB examinations account for the remaining 80%.”

Moreover, the approaches to assessment taught by NCDC were perceived by some participants to differ from what UNEB practises during the end of the cycle assessment, reinforcing teachers’ doubts. A male participant in Nabilatuk explained,

“I feel that NCDC and our examining body, UNEB, are not fully aligned. In the limited assessment training

we received during the curriculum rollout, we were taught one model of assessment and grading. However, UNEB now applies a different approach, including different grading methods. For instance, we were trained to assess through activities of integration and use identifiers, yet UNEB's current assessments does not follow that model."

Designing assessment tasks remains a major challenge for many teachers, who struggle to create tasks that are fit for purpose and appropriate for learners' levels. For some, the shift from the old curriculum's direct, recall-based questions to a scenario-based approach has been particularly difficult; learners who once handled straightforward items now struggle when questions are presented through narratives or real-life situations. This points to a broader issue of readiness, as both teachers and students are still adjusting to the higher-order thinking required by the curriculum. A female participant in Nakapiripirit shared,

"When it comes to assessment, the use of story-based or scenario-based questions presents its own challenges. First, it is difficult for us to develop appropriate scenarios. Second, even when suitable scenarios are developed, many learners struggle to interpret them. Some have trouble understanding the narrative and identifying the underlying problem, which means they fail to grasp what the question requires and are unable to provide the appropriate solution."

In schools where teachers still struggled to design assessment tasks, some participants reported relying on their school networks to develop appropriate tasks, as a male teacher in Madi-Okollo explained,

"I struggle with forming scenario-based questions, as this curriculum is new. To ensure they fit the learning outcomes, I consult colleagues in the subject area. I also involve language teachers to check grammar and phrasing, so learners can understand."

Findings further revealed that misunderstandings related to assessment were not limited to teachers; in some cases, they were reinforced by school administrators who continue to emphasise summative, termly exams, the familiar pattern under the old curriculum. Additionally, parents in some schools—because of their limited understanding of the new curriculum and its assessment approach—still demand progress reports similar to those used in the phased-out system. This has also placed pressure on teachers. As a female participant in an FGD in Terego explained,

"The main challenge with the new curriculum is the conservativeness of some administrators and parents. They expect assessments like the old system; beginning, mid, and end-of-term exams, while the curriculum requires continuous assessments. This resistance makes it difficult for teachers to implement the new approach effectively."

The other persistent puzzle is project-based learning, a well-intended approach in the curriculum for teaching that remains blurry in execution. Most teachers conceptualise projects as standalone activities, mostly vocational in nature, instead of structured inquiries emerging from subject concepts. This can be evidenced in a reflection by one male teacher in Amudat,

"The new curriculum emphasises the creation of tangible products through project work. Learners are encouraged to produce items with practical value, for example, making doughnuts that can be sold for income or planting trees that yield visible results."

While such examples demonstrate the curriculum's emphasis on producing tangible outcomes, their educational value as project-based learning depends on how clearly, they are anchored to specific subject topics and themes. Without a structured, step-by-step inquiry process that links the project to disciplinary concepts, these tasks risk becoming mere practical activities rather than meaningful learning experiences that deepen understanding within a particular subject and application to real-life situations.

Similarly, some teachers acknowledged difficulties in identifying suitable projects for certain subjects, as a male teacher in Amudat noted:

"Each subject requires a project, but sometimes it's difficult to identify suitable projects, for example, in CRE. Teachers are unsure what qualifies as appropriate project work. We need support on how to handle project-based learning."

Teachers' struggles to select or guide appropriate projects risks engaging learners in activities disconnected from intended outcomes, thereby limiting the development of knowledge and skills and reducing the effectiveness of project-based learning.

Teachers' discussions also reveal something deeper than a knowledge gap—a mindset gap. While many acknowledged the value of the competence-based curriculum, some demonstrated hesitancy to let go of familiar, teacher-led routines. They are finding it challenging to unlearn old practices. Several teachers described learner-centred strategies as good in theory, but too slow for the realities of their classrooms. A female teacher in Terego reflected,

“A challenge with this new curriculum lies in its methodology. The techniques are time-consuming, especially when learners work on assignments without adequate materials. Students take much longer to complete activities.”

To many, those extra minutes spent on learner engagement felt like minutes stolen from syllabus coverage. Teachers worried that when lessons stretch too long, topics pile up and deadlines drift further away. The concern about content delay, therefore, was often framed as a consequence of lost instructional time.

Others linked the struggle to learners' prior conditioning. Some teachers felt that students transitioning from rural primary schools were not adequately prepared to take the steering wheel of their learning, particularly when English—the main medium of instruction—still feels foreign for many. One male teacher in Nakapiripirit explained,

“The curriculum expects learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning, but many from rural backgrounds have not had close academic support before. In Secondary school, they are expected to operate entirely in English which they struggle with. If we adopt a learner-centred model and give them time to work independently, the intended learning outcomes may not be achieved.”

This reflection suggests that teachers may be unaware that learners who struggle with the language of instruction can still be supported within a learner-centred approach. Their assumption indicates a gap in strategies that integrate language scaffolding while maintaining learner autonomy.

Some participants perceived that their learners could not be transformed, classifying them as accustomed to being passive recipients in the learning process, which runs counter to the curriculum's expectations. As a result, these teachers tended to continue using teacher-centred approaches, which they believed were more suitable for their students. A male teacher in Nakapiripirit shared,

“The curriculum is not fully tailored to meet the needs and realities of the local population. Our learners are used to being provided knowledge and shown how to apply it. The new curriculum demands learners who are self-driven, computer literate, and comfortable navigating information alone. This becomes a major challenge when learners are left on their own.”

This implies that the continued existence of teacher centred approaches in classrooms was not merely an issue of limited capacity building for teachers on the new approaches but equally an issue of rigidity and negative perceptions among some teachers. Additionally, teacher's role as a facilitator is still misunderstood. Some teachers interpreted facilitation as stepping back and leaving learners to figure things out alone, rather than guiding them actively through structured discovery, scaffolding, and supervision. Classroom observations confirmed this misconception as several teachers refrained from active engagement during learner activities, unintentionally turning facilitation into passivity.

Resource constraints also hindered the successful implementation of the curriculum. Despite the emphasis on ICT integration in lessons, limited access to digital tools restricted both teachers' and learners' engagement in research. As a male participant from Nabilatuk noted,

“We don't have any ICT materials, such as laptops or computers, for learners to use for research. Even the teachers have no access, as the school does not have a single computer.”

In other contexts, even when resources were available, the lack of electricity limited their effective use, as another male teacher in Nabilatuk explained,

“In places like ours, infrastructure is lacking. For example, while projectors may be available, many classrooms lack sufficient electricity to run them, making it extremely difficult to implement the ICT requirements of the curriculum.”

ICT integration was also hampered by limited understanding and capacity to use digital resources. Although survey data indicated high self-reported access to ICT tools (93.6%) and strong confidence in sourcing online educational materials (87.3%), observations and teachers' FGD reflections told a different story. Participants

highlighted capacity gaps in using digital tools. As a male participant in Nakapiripirit explained,

“Some teachers were trained at a time when there were no computers or smartphones. They still use basic phones. How can they teach the new curriculum without proper retooling on ICT?”

Similarly, a male participant in Terego noted,

“There is a gap in ICT knowledge. We have some basic skills, but we would appreciate more opportunities for training so that we can become conversant with these technologies.”

Headteachers also acknowledged gaps in their staff’s ability to use digital resources for preparation and instruction, and highlighted efforts to build teachers’ capacity. As one Headteacher in Yumbe explained,

“Curriculum changes found many teachers with limited ICT skills. Many still cannot use projectors or download teaching materials on their smartphones.”

She further noted that, to bridge this gap, they “identified a few teachers with some expertise, strengthened their skills, and they now support their colleagues.” Despite this peer support mechanism in some schools, the overall competence remains uneven.

Beyond technology, teachers described crippling shortages of basic curriculum materials. In some schools, both learners’ and teachers’ guides are inadequate or completely unavailable, for both O’ level and A’ level. This insufficiency affects lesson preparation and delivery, and the uncertainty around when adequate resources will be provided has left some teachers in a dilemma. A male participant in an FGD in Nakapiripirit noted,

“At Advanced level, there is still no clear guidance on the content that learners are expected to study. Teachers have been given the topics, but there are no textbooks or reference materials to support instruction.”

Relatedly, a male participant in Nabilatuk remarked,

“One major challenge we face is inadequate teaching materials. The curriculum requires group activities that rely on learner textbooks, yet I may have 100 students and only two books. It becomes nearly impossible to support effective learning under these conditions.”

This reflection also reveals a misconception among teachers about the purpose of group work. Group activities are not meant to depend solely on learners’ guides; they should be used intentionally, based on the lesson design and the competencies to be developed. As a female teacher in an FGD in Madi-Okollo remarked,

“According to the design of the new lower secondary curriculum, students are supposed to be in groups.”

This further illustrates the confusion around how grouping should be applied. Classroom observations confirmed this misunderstanding as learners often remained in permanent groups across all subjects, and teachers seldom reorganised them to suit specific activities. This indicates a broader misinterpretation of the role of grouping.

In schools where teachers described gaps in learning materials, headteachers expressed the same unease in their interviews. One headteacher in Nabilatuk recalled this with a mix of resignation and exhaustion,

“The curriculum was brought to us like a trial. We still lack essential teaching materials. As we approach the end of Term 2, everyone is gambling with the curriculum.”

Another Headteacher in Yumbe traced the strain back to poor timing and limited supply of textbooks by saying,

“Even when orientation and training happened, the books themselves lagged years behind teachers’ lesson plans. By 2024, Senior 3 and 4 textbooks were only delivered when the first cohort was already preparing for national exams. Senior 5, now pioneering the new Advanced level phase, is still operating without textbooks altogether: As I speak now, teachers in Senior 5 face a dilemma: this is the first cohort of the new Advanced level curriculum, and although teachers have been trained, they have not yet received textbooks.”

Besides textbook shortages, there was confusion in the marketplace about the authenticity of available resources. Both teachers and headteachers expressed concerns about whether textbooks on the market truly align with the curriculum. With many publishers and no clear indication of which ones are authorised, procuring additional materials to fill existing gaps has become complicated. Some participants also alleged that certain textbooks marketed as aligned to the new curriculum still contain content that was phased-out. One headteacher in

Yumbe explained,

“NCDC informed us that their books were only samples and that we could purchase others from the market. Although many publishers have produced books for the new curriculum, there is no clear system to certify which materials are accurate. You still find books mixed with content from the old curriculum.”

Participants therefore suggested that NCDC should certify and recommend publishers whose textbooks meet the requirements of the current curriculum, noting that this would greatly ease the burden of selecting appropriate materials. As one headteacher in Yumbe explained,

“We would like to request NCDC to scrutinise and certify textbook publishers and recommend reliable sources for purchasing materials, in addition to government supplies.”

She added that publishers often seek feedback from schools, yet teachers are not ready to provide it,

“Currently, many publishers approach us for feedback on their books, but since we have not fully internalised the curriculum, we lack the capacity to accurately recommend which ones are suitable.”

Teacher motivation also weighed heavily on classroom practices. Pay disparities between science and arts teachers have fractured staff morale, creating camps of the rewarded and the overlooked. Participants felt that the level of effort required to implement the curriculum effectively demands a motivated workforce, yet the current pay structure fosters a sense of discrimination. This division extends into pedagogy, weakening trust, collaboration, and ownership of the appropriate practices. As one male participant in Nakapiripirit put it,

“Look at the salary disparities; that alone undermines effective curriculum implementation. You introduce something new and say you’re motivating teachers, but only a certain category receives the benefits. The others won’t feel motivated to put in the same effort to implement the curriculum effectively.”

Headteachers also underscored how damaging this divide has been for teaching and learning, noting that the tension goes beyond low morale and has spiralled to disruption of school operations. One Headteacher in Nabilatuk described the situation as more than mere discontent,

“As of now, teachers are on industrial action due to huge salary disparities. The staffroom is split between science and arts. It has been a serious blow to teaching.”

A headteacher in Yumbe echoed similar concerns, emphasising the management dilemmas created by pay disparities and their effect on staff cohesion,

“In my opinion, pay needs to be standardised because the current system has divided staff into two groups. This sometimes leads to quarrels and resentment among teachers. It is very difficult to expect staff to work at the same pace when some are better compensated than others. Managing a satisfied group alongside an unsatisfied one has become a big challenge for us as headteachers.”

Teachers’ workload, particularly in understaffed schools with overcrowded classrooms, was another major barrier. FGD participants noted that the demands of the competence-based curriculum are far greater than those of the phased-out curriculum, increasing teachers’ burden and stress. As one male participant in Yumbe explained,

“This new curriculum has put much more pressure on teachers, especially because the workload around assessment has increased. With large numbers of learners, assessing each student individually takes a lot of time. Unlike the old curriculum, where we taught the whole class at once and could even send notes for students to copy, the new curriculum requires that notes are developed together with learners in class.”

This reflects a clear tension between the curriculum’s demands and teachers’ preparedness. Although teachers understand the expectations, their reservations stem from perceived practical constraints—large classes, time-consuming assessment requirements, and the transition away from traditional teaching practices. They feel overwhelmed because the expectations do not align with the realities of their classroom conditions and resources. This tension risks undermining effective implementation, as overstretched teachers may struggle to deliver the intended learning outcomes.

### 3.6 ENHANCING LEARNING THROUGH LANGUAGE

**Objective: To establish language support strategies used by teachers to promote learning in schools.**

Language support strategies play a critical role in creating learning environments where all learners can participate meaningfully and have both their linguistic and comprehension needs addressed. To understand how teachers facilitate learning in highly multilingual contexts, this section examines the strategies used across schools. In the study districts, particularly the refugee-hosting areas of West Nile, classrooms comprise learners with diverse linguistic backgrounds and varied levels of proficiency in the language of instruction. Understanding how teachers navigate these complexities is essential for identifying both the opportunities and challenges that shape learners' experiences. The findings that follow draw on teachers' reflections from FGDs, headteachers' interviews, and insights from classroom observations to illustrate the formal, informal, and adaptive approaches schools employ to promote comprehension, participation, and inclusion in multilingual settings.

#### 3.6.1 Findings at primary school level

Most teachers reported having learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds, making language a central challenge in both teaching and learning. Across schools, teachers consistently identified English, the official language of instruction, as a particular hurdle for younger learners and those without prior exposure to nursery education. A male teacher from Amudat noted,

"The main challenge I face in my class is the language barrier. Some children cannot speak or understand English."

Even in contexts where teachers are permitted to use local or familiar languages, especially in the lower primary classes, the wide variety of languages represented makes communication difficult. In some cases, teachers themselves struggle when they do not understand the learners' familiar languages, even when all children may be using a single local language. A male teacher from Madi-Okollo explained,

"I have struggled with the language barrier because our school has learners from many language groups—different parts of South Sudan and the local communities. Sometimes I want to explain something in a local language, but I cannot speak all of them. For example, the Nweri community has recently arrived, and in the lower classes many learners only know their local language."

Findings from the FGDs revealed that teachers employ a range of strategies to address language difficulties and support learner comprehension. A frequently mentioned approach was the use of visual teaching aids such as pictures, charts, and real objects to help bridge gaps in understanding. As a female teacher from Yumbe stated,

"We use instructional materials. When you show a real object, the learner can understand the word more easily."

Teachers also reported relying on gestures, particularly when neither the learner understands the language of instruction nor the teacher understands the learner's local language. As one female teacher in Madi-Okollo remarked,

"My learners in Primary One come from different places and speak different languages, and I don't know all of them. Sometimes I use gestures to ensure they pick what I say."

Peer support emerged as another key strategy. Teachers often ask bilingual learners, those who understand both the language of instruction and their classmates' languages, to translate for peers. A male teacher in Terego noted,

"We ask a learner who understands both English and the local language to translate for the others. For example, a Kakwa-speaking learner helping to explain a concept to classmates."

In some schools, this buddy system is more structured, as a male teacher in Nakapiripirit shared,

"When a child does not understand English and only speaks Ngakarimojong, I pair them with a child who speaks both English and Ngakarimojong to translate."

In other related cases, teachers themselves translate when necessary, alternating between the language of instruction and learners' familiar languages for those struggling. A male teacher in Terego said,

“If a learner cannot understand a word, I move closer and translate it into the local language so that next time they will remember it.”

Similarly, a female teacher in Amudat shared,

“We use both English and local languages. If a child cannot understand a concept in English, we explain it in the local language so they can understand what we mean.”

A few teachers even reported trying to learn basic words in unfamiliar languages to support their learners better, as one male participant in Amudat noted,

“There are differences in the languages spoken by learners. To manage this, I try to learn some of their words so that communication becomes easier.”

Beyond ad-hoc translation, some schools have what teachers described as “language resilience” systems in which resource persons or specially trained individuals support multilingual instruction. A male teacher from Terego explained,

“Some people are trained specifically to support language use in classrooms...they may be employed to assist with translation.”

Similarly, a female teacher from Nakapiripirit reported occasionally bringing in resource persons “to interpret for those who cannot understand the language of instruction, and to help them receive information in their own languages.”

Co-curricular activities were also described as contributing to language development. Debate clubs, public speaking platforms, and assemblies help learners build expressive confidence and strengthen English proficiency. A male teacher in Terego noted,

“We have a debating club which helps strengthen learners’ communication skills—how to express themselves and speak confidently. It supports both language development and learning.”

Headteachers echoed this value with one from Amudat explaining that debates help staff “identify gaps and encourage learners,” while also boosting confidence during assemblies.

Another strategy involved slowing down speech and using simplified language to enhance understanding. A male teacher in Terego highlighted this, stating,

“In my classroom, I ensure clarity in the words I use. This helps learners apply the same words correctly in their daily lives.”

Teachers and headteachers also emphasised following the thematic curriculum, which encourages the use of local or familiar languages in lower primary and transitioning to English from Primary 4 onward. The headteacher from Amudat noted,

“The language policy encourages local language instruction from Primary 1 to Primary 3, with Primary 4 being a transitional class.”

In some schools, staff encouraged learners to use only English while at school, citing the multilingual contexts that do not permit identification of a single local language. A Headteacher in Nabilatuk explained,

“We have learners from different tribes, so we encourage them to use English, which unifies everyone. If they rely only on their native languages, others may feel excluded, so we promote English to create fairness.”

At the same time, some schools that emphasised English adopted disciplinary measures to discourage the use of local languages. A Headteacher in Yumbe stated,

“To discourage speaking vernacular, we have sacks that learners must wear if they are caught using local languages. This helps train them to speak English.”

While intended to promote English use, such practices highlight differing beliefs regarding language and inclusion. Strict English-only policies, especially those involving punitive measures, may have unintended consequences. They can limit comprehension, silence learners who lack confidence, and deepen existing learning gaps. In efforts to promote fairness, such rigidity may instead reduce inclusivity by disadvantaging learners who rely on

local languages to understand classroom content.

Findings from classroom observations revealed limited use of many of these strategies in actual practice. Commonly observed were blended use of local languages and English (particularly in lower primary), reliance on realia such as pictures, charts, and plants, and simplifying instruction through repetition. Teachers also posed open and closed questions, directed questions to individuals, responded to and repeated learners' answers, occasionally created opportunities for peer collaboration, used relatable examples, and clarified instructions. However, these practices were not consistent across classrooms.

Overall, teachers employ a flexible mix of strategies such as peer translation, teacher translation, multilingual instruction, visual aids, gesture, dramatization, debate clubs, and targeted language support to ensure learners understand content and participate meaningfully. These approaches reflect both adaptive classroom-level innovations and school-wide efforts to nurture language development in diverse learning environments.

### 3.6.2 Findings at secondary school level

Across secondary schools, teachers and headteachers described navigating highly multilingual learning environments by emphasising strategies that promote inclusivity, clarity, and effective communication. Discussions with teachers across all study districts revealed a strong emphasis on establishing a common language—primarily English, the official language of instruction—as a means to support inclusive learning in linguistically diverse classroom settings. This emphasis was present both inside and outside the classroom.

Because most schools host learners from multiple ethnic groups, shared communication was viewed as essential for classroom cohesion. As one female teacher from Yumbe explained,

“Teachers must use a universal language. If a teacher uses a local language, other learners may be excluded. We therefore use a language that everyone can understand so all learners are included in the learning process.”

Similarly, a male teacher from Nakapiripirit echoed this view,

“We encourage learners to practice using English and avoid local languages. This helps bridge differences in their backgrounds and allows them to communicate easily using one common language in the school setting.”

Headteachers equally regarded English as the unifying language that reduces exclusion and ensures equal participation. They reported consistently encouraging learners to use English at all times, emphasising its importance for both communication and curriculum delivery. One Headteacher in Nakapiripirit explained,

“Our language policy allows only one medium of communication, English. We have learners from many tribes and using multiple languages would create confusion. Though Kiswahili is taught as a subject in Senior One and Senior Two, outside those lessons, we insist on English. Even on the compound, when we hear learners using local languages, we remind them to use English.”

Another Headteacher in Amudat linked the promotion of English to broader goals of social cohesion, noting,

“Our policy promotes English to reduce tribalism and encourage interaction across regions. We ask learners to make friends from different backgrounds so they are compelled to use English to communicate.”

Over time, this reinforces English as the natural medium of interaction within the school environment.

In a few schools, punitive measures were also reported as a means of discouraging the use of vernacular languages. A Headteacher in Nabilatuk noted,

“We place restrictions on the use of other local languages, sometimes with punishments, to help learners rely more on English and Kiswahili.”

Although such measures aim to promote inclusivity, they may have unintended effects. Learners with limited proficiency risk being silenced or misunderstood, potentially deepening existing learning gaps. Thus, in attempts to promote fairness, rigid enforcement of English-only policies may inadvertently reduce inclusivity by disadvantaging learners who require occasional support in local languages to grasp complex concepts.

Despite the overarching focus on English, some teachers adopted additional strategies to support comprehension

when necessary. A small number reported occasionally using other languages to clarify meaning, often through peer-based support. A male teacher from Madi-Okollo described asking learners to translate unfamiliar words,

“Sometimes we have to use local languages. If I don’t know a particular word, I ask a student who understands both English and the local language to translate.”

Similarly, in a school in Nabilatuk, the Headteacher noted implementing learner “families”, where they are grouped to encourage mutual support in English or Kiswahili.

In several schools in both Karamoja and West Nile, Kiswahili was used occasionally alongside English to expand accessibility. As one headteacher in Terego noted,

“We use two languages: English and Kiswahili. In Senior 1 and 2, and sometimes during assembly, we use both. Translation into Kakwa, Arabic, or occasionally Lugbara is done sometimes, depending on the linguistic composition of the class.”

A few teachers also reported relying on visual aids such as pictures, charts, and real-life objects to enhance comprehension. A male teacher in Amudat described using a “talking classroom,” where displays of written information and diagrams support language exposure and understanding. Some teachers additionally used gestures to reinforce meaning, though this was far less common. A male teacher from Nakapiripirit highlighted their value,

“Sometimes I use gestures when explaining a point or demonstrating something unfamiliar to the learners. Gestures help clarify meaning and support learning.”

Classroom observations showed that many of the anticipated language support strategies were only minimally applied in day-to-day teaching. Consistent with accounts from teachers and headteachers, lessons were largely conducted in English, which served as the primary medium of instruction and interaction. A few supportive practices such as the use of natural objects as teaching aids, occasional blending of local languages, and simplifying explanations through repetition were observed, but not consistently. Some teachers also sought to engage learners by posing different types of questions, directing questions to individuals, echoing or rephrasing learners’ responses, creating opportunities for peer support through group activities, using relatable examples, and clarifying instructions where necessary. However, the frequency and quality of these strategies varied substantially across classrooms.

Together, these findings indicate that while multilingual realities persist, most schools adopt a strong English-medium approach to bridge linguistic diversity and foster a sense of unity among learners from different cultural and language backgrounds. Only a few teachers complement this with gestures, visual materials, peer translation, or occasional use of local languages to ensure that learners with limited proficiency are not left behind.

These dynamics ultimately reveal a disconnect between the linguistic diversity of learners and the predominantly monolingual instructional practices in place. The limited use of language supportive strategies means that many learners continue to navigate lessons with insufficient linguistic scaffolding. Consequently, those with lower English proficiency are more likely to experience confusion, disengagement, and slower academic progress, even within school environments that aspire to promote unity and inclusivity.

## 4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Summary of Findings

**Objective:** *To explore how teachers create, promote, and utilise a supportive teaching environment that enhances their professional growth and well-being.*

**Primary schools:** Teachers reported strong leadership, management, and collaboration skills. Survey scores were high overall for leadership and management ( $M = 4.54$ ) and collaboration ( $M = 4.56$ ), with teachers in Karamoja scoring higher than those in West Nile across both domains. Men and women reported similar levels of strength in both areas, with no significant gender gaps at the overall level. This points to a teaching workforce that sees itself as able to guide colleagues, foster teamwork, and manage resources in ways that support learning and growth in the profession.

Headteachers and teachers described clear systems for induction, where new or community teachers work alongside experienced colleagues to plan and deliver lessons before taking classes alone. Schools provide ongoing professional development through internal workshops, peer mentoring, exposure visits to other schools, access to planning tools, open sharing of ideas and materials. Teachers spoke of supportive supervision that focuses on joint reflection, strengths, and agreed areas for improvement, rather than punishment. Additionally, schools implemented multiple strategies primarily focused on financial relief, welfare provision, and psychosocial well-being. These included savings schemes, small allowances, school meals, housing support, access to cultivation land, basic health services, counselling structures, and recreational activities. Together, these practices build a collegial culture that strengthens teachers' professional skills, instructional practice, builds trust, and supports teachers' confidence and wellbeing.

However, the findings reveal that these supportive practices were not consistent across all schools. There were significant gaps in the institutionalisation of structured professional development in both subregions. Although supportive measures were present, they were predominantly welfare-oriented and relational, with limited integration into coherent systems for sustained instructional improvement. Professional development initiatives were often informal, leadership-dependent, and inconsistently implemented, lacking clear progression pathways, systematic mentoring, and mechanisms for monitoring teaching quality. Moreover, many support structures appeared vulnerable to leadership turnover and fluctuations in external partner support, indicating weak institutional anchoring.

**Secondary schools:** Secondary teachers reported strong leadership, management, and collaboration skills. Survey scores were high for leadership and management ( $M = 4.57$ ) and collaboration ( $M = 4.61$ ). Teachers in West Nile rated themselves higher than those in Karamoja on both dimensions. Female teachers scored higher than male teachers on leadership and collaboration, with the differences significant overall, especially in West Nile. This points to a strong role for women teachers in shaping collegial, supportive, and professionally enriching school environments.

Headteachers and teachers described supervision as supportive, not fault finding, with heads of department observing lessons, giving feedback, and guiding improvement. Schools use team teaching, joint lesson preparation, departmental note writing, and peer observation to build shared practice. In a few schools, workshops, peer learning, and mentorship were key avenues for strengthening teacher capacity and sustaining motivation. Occasional district level capacity building reinforced this culture of continuous learning.

Collaborative environments and peer support further operated as emotional support mechanisms. Staff come together when a colleague faces difficulties both personal and professional, engage in team-based problem-solving, sharing resources, hold social events, and offer informal counselling. Teachers reported that these professional and social ties help them manage stress, feel valued, and stay motivated, which in turn supports better teaching and learner outcomes.

At the institutional level, supportive teaching environments are primarily anchored in welfare-based interventions that address teachers' emotional and economic vulnerabilities. Schools recognise that professional growth cannot occur independently of basic well-being. Through counselling structures, advisory relationships, collective savings schemes, and supplementary allowances, teachers' personal circumstances are stabilised.

Despite portraying schools as empathetic and socially cohesive, a notable imbalance in how support is conceptualised and operationalised was revealed. Institutional efforts are strongly oriented toward stabilising teachers' emotional and economic well-being, yet less systematically structured to advance instructional

expertise. Professional development mechanisms remain largely under-specified and dependent on individual initiative or leadership commitment, with limited evidence of institutionalised mentoring, systematic feedback cycles, protected collaboration time, or proactive improvement frameworks. As a result, while welfare-based and reactive support systems contribute meaningfully to morale and retention, they appear fragile, uneven, and insufficiently anchored to sustain coherent, long-term professional growth.

**Objective: To establish school and community practices that enhance child protection, wellbeing, and inclusion.**

**Primary schools:** Teachers reported strong skills in relating with parents and communities, with an overall average of 4.61 out of 5 on effective community relations, with Karamoja teachers rating themselves slightly higher than those in West Nile. Male and female teachers reported similar competence in engaging parents, sharing learner progress, and collaborating with stakeholders to support children's learning and wellbeing.

Qualitative data showed that many schools have active structures and practices that support child protection and wellbeing. These include child protection committees, disciplinary and guidance units, routine referrals to health facilities, collaboration with local councils and police, and regular engagement with parents and School Management Committees on child safety cases. A few schools in Karamoja described additional practices such as routine health screening, daily counselling, gender sensitive mentoring on menstrual hygiene, and child rights clubs that promote participation and respect. In West Nile, parents often contributed food and joined school led hygiene campaigns and community activities.

Teachers described deliberate efforts to promote inclusion and equal participation in class. Many reported calling on boys, girls, and learners with disabilities, using them in learning aids, and forming mixed gender groups with shared roles. Classroom observations confirmed that several teachers managed participation fairly and encouraged collaborative work. Gaps remained, as these inclusive and gender responsive practices were not consistent across classrooms and were less visible in some West Nile schools. In some lessons, teachers unintentionally favoured one gender, which risked sending mixed messages about equality and limiting the full inclusion of all learners. Beyond ensuring equal access and participation, there was limited evidence of deliberate efforts to engage learners in critically reflecting on gender norms, stereotypes, and power relations. As a result, practices tended to be gender-accommodating rather than genuinely gender-transformative, with limited structured opportunities for learners to question and reshape inequitable social expectations.

**Secondary schools:** Teachers reported strong skills in working with parents and communities, with an average score of 4.62 out of 5 on effective community relations, with West Nile teachers rating themselves slightly higher than those in Karamoja. Across subregions, female teachers reported slightly higher scores than male teachers, and this difference was significant at the overall secondary level. This points to an important role for female teachers in fostering inclusive communication, encouraging parental participation, and promoting community engagement in school activities.

Qualitative data showed a wide range of school and community practices that support child protection, wellbeing, and inclusion. Across both regions, schools reported bursary schemes for vulnerable learners, guidance and counselling in collaboration with community, active referral to local authorities, police, and health services, and structured engagement with parents through meetings and letters. Initiatives such as family days, mentorship programmes, peace and debate clubs, and sports created spaces for emotional support and social skills, including for refugee learners. Teachers described efforts to integrate shy learners through group work, identify and respond to special educational needs, and promote equal participation of girls and boys in lessons and co-curricular activities. Classroom observations confirmed many of these inclusive practices, though application was uneven across classrooms, schools and subregions. Teacher-learner interactions and emotional or psychosocial support varied, with stronger attention observed in refugee-hosting contexts. This unevenness appeared linked to differences in teacher training and exposure to continuous professional development, as well as structural challenges such as large class sizes that limited intentional strategies to promote participation for all learners.

**Objective: To assess teachers' practices on classroom management, instruction and assessment.**

**Primary schools:** Teachers reported high self-rated pedagogical skills with an overall mean of 4.38 out of 5, with teachers in Karamoja scoring higher than those in West Nile and no significant gender differences. This suggests that teaching effectiveness is not determined by gender and highlights the importance of maintaining gender diversity within the teaching workforce.

- **Planning and preparation:** Classroom observations showed that most teachers prepared for lessons, with 68.4% having both a scheme of work and a lesson plan, and another 22.4% having at least one

of these documents. Where lesson plans existed, there was strong alignment between planned objectives, methods, activities, and the lessons delivered, which supported clear flow and active learner engagement. However, planning and implementation were not consistent across classrooms. Around one in ten observed teachers had no planning documents, and in a few cases the scheme of work did not include the lesson taught. Some teachers ended lessons before completing planned activities or only implemented selected parts of the plan despite having enough time. These gaps show that while most primary teachers plan and use lesson plans meaningfully, there are weaknesses in long-term planning and full execution of planned learning experiences that call for targeted support.

- ***Classroom control and management:*** Most classrooms provided basic safety and order. Spaces were often clean, organised, well lit, and free from obvious hazards, even where lessons took place under trees. Teachers used a wide range of strategies to gain and sustain attention, included clapping, call and response routines, songs and rhymes, calling learners by name, moving inattentive pupils to the front, random questioning, and use of humour. Some teachers set class rules and used reminders and positive reinforcement to guide behaviour. Where these practices were consistent, lessons ran with high engagement. Teacher pupil relationships were mostly warm and respectful; many teachers corrected errors kindly, encouraged effort, and used praise, clapping, and playful titles to build confidence. These interactions supported cooperation and participation. Conflict handling also varied, with some teachers listening to both sides calmly, using agreed rules to restore peace, and giving learners a chance to express feelings and practice respect.

Contrary, persistent risks in the physical environment reduced safety and comfort. Infrastructure gaps, overcrowding, poor ventilation, unsafe furniture, storage of items like metallic beds, and untidy and dusty rooms added health risks and discomfort. Large class sizes restricted teacher and student movement, compromised safety, and reduced concentration, which in turn affected classroom management and limited the use of interactive or participatory pedagogical practices. In crowded or cramped rooms, behaviour was harder to manage, and off task behaviour often went unchecked. Corporal punishment, verbal abuse, and threats still appeared in some classrooms, despite legal prohibition, which introduced fear and weakened a supportive climate. These occurrences were more pronounced in the West Nile subregion, in both refugee and non-refugee classrooms, where corporal punishment was used for behavioural control, discipline, and conflict resolution. Some classrooms showed strained or neglectful relationships between teachers and learners, marked by harsh tones, threats, or indifference to disengaged learners. These patterns normalise unsafe and fear-based environments, limit learners' social and emotional skill development, and signal gaps in teacher agency, awareness, and accountability for rights-based, positive classroom management.

- ***Delivery and presentation:*** Teachers made clear efforts to involve learners in lessons. Most classes used questioning, reading aloud, writing on the chalkboard, and demonstrations. In several classrooms, teachers ensured that both boys and girls had chances to respond and used praise to reinforce effort and motivate learners. Rarely, group work was introduced and learners presented, but where implemented it led to richer interaction and more active engagement. There were many examples of creative and context-based use of materials, including charts, flashcards, manila papers, stones, seeds, fruits, soil samples, clothing, real plants, and picture cards to explain concepts. In these lessons, learners handled materials, and this hands-on use of realia made learning concrete and relatable. Only a few lessons demonstrated the emerging use of ICT to support teaching. Some teachers linked content closely to learners' daily lives using relatable examples, the environment, and translation to local dialects. In a few lessons, learners were invited to share experiences or explain why the lesson mattered in their lives. In these cases, learners saw clear links between classroom content and their environments, livelihoods, and relationships.

On the other hand, in many classrooms, participation remained mostly teacher led. Learners responded to prompts but rarely initiated questions or ideas. Inquiry, reflection, and peer to peer dialogue were limited. Even when teachers invited questions, learners often stayed silent, which points to deep habits of passivity and limited confidence. Opportunities for critical thinking and exploration were not yet routine in most lessons. Use of materials was uneven across classrooms with many lessons relying only on the chalkboard, textbook, and syllabus. In some lessons, teachers brought materials but kept them in their own hands, showing and explaining instead of letting learners manipulate, and generally instruction stayed abstract. ICT was rarely used in classrooms, only a small share of teachers reported confidence

in sourcing materials online, and observations confirmed that digital tools were almost absent during teaching. Gaps in skills, infrastructure, and school level support limit meaningful ICT integration. Also, connections to real life were inconsistent. While some teachers used strong local examples, many others relied only on textbook content and examples without extending to wider community realities. This weakens relevance and reduces chances for learners to transfer knowledge to everyday situations.

- **Assessment:** Teachers used a mix of formative and summative assessments. Questioning, short exercises, group discussions, practical demonstrations, and written tasks were common. In several classes, teachers asked probing and real-life questions that supported deeper thinking and discussion. Written work was often marked immediately, with teachers guiding corrections and explaining errors. In a few classrooms, learners assessed each other's work and reflected on their own progress, which encouraged shared responsibility for learning. Teachers frequently used classroom-based assessment outcomes to praise effort, celebrate good performance, and keep learners motivated. For struggling learners, teachers provided targeted feedback, re-explained concepts, and offered additional guidance, helping these learners stay engaged and build confidence alongside their peers. Where records were kept, teachers used them to plan remedial work, re-teach topics, and identify learners needing extra support.

However, assessments practices were not uniform across classrooms. Questioning focused mainly on recall of facts and definitions, with many yes or no checks. Opportunities for reasoning, explanation, and application were limited in most classrooms. Learners seldom asked questions, and in many lessons, they were not invited to do so, which reduced learner agency and inquiry. Use of varied assessment methods was uneven while some teachers relied only on note giving without any checks for understanding during the lesson. Peer and self-assessment appeared in only a few classes and are not yet a regular feature. Record keeping was generally weak; although teachers marked and corrected work, many did not document daily results in any systematic way. This reduced their ability to track individual progress over time or base support on clear evidence. These gaps limit the full value of assessment as a tool for improving learning, not only measuring it.

- **Gender and inclusion:** Several classrooms demonstrated intentional efforts to include learners with disabilities. Teachers seated those with hearing or visual difficulties at the front, spoke loudly, repeated instructions, allowed extra time, and checked on them regularly. Some teachers slowed the lesson pace, deliberately included these learners in mixed-ability groups, and offered targeted support to help them participate actively in discussions and collaborative tasks. Many teachers also showed awareness of diverse learning needs more broadly. They moved around the classroom, called learners by name, monitored individual progress, and offered personalised explanations or guided practice to help slower learners keep up. Such practices reflected patience and a clear commitment to involving every learner. Gender-inclusive strategies were also evident. In several lessons, teachers alternated between boys and girls when asking questions, formed mixed-gender groups, and assigned leadership roles equitably. Some made deliberate efforts to draw out shy learners, ensuring that participation and visibility were shared across genders. Seating arrangements and turn-taking practices reinforced the message that all learners could contribute. The findings also highlight the broader value of gender-responsive teaching and gender-balanced school environments.

However, these inclusive practices were mostly inconsistent. In some classrooms, learners with disabilities were placed in groups without receiving any additional support, leaving them disengaged. Others with clear learning or hearing difficulties received no adaptation at all. Treating all learners "the same" often meant that individual needs went unmet. Responsiveness to learning differences also varied widely. Some teachers focused mainly on active pupils at the front, neglecting those at the back or those who struggled. Awareness did not always translate into concrete action, and support for slower learners depended largely on individual initiative rather than systematic practice. Gender inclusion also showed gaps. In some lessons, one gender dominated participation with no corrective action from the teacher; in others, the teacher focused disproportionately on one gender, creating a different imbalance. Few teachers challenged gender stereotypes or used lesson content to promote more equitable norms.

**Secondary schools:** Teachers rated their pedagogical skills highly, with an overall mean of 4.38 out of 5, with no differences in scores among teachers in Karamoja and West Nile. At the overall level, female teachers reported higher scores on pedagogical skills than the male teachers. This reinforces the important contribution of female teachers to effective teaching and the value of maintaining gender-balanced teaching workforces in schools.

- **Planning and preparation:** Classroom observations revealed that just over half (52.5%) of observed teachers had both schemes of work and lesson plans that were clear, detailed, and well aligned with classroom delivery. Lessons in these classrooms showed a smooth flow from activities to assessment, with strong consistency between schemes, lesson plans, and what happened in class. Teachers who prepared thoroughly stayed close to their plans and used them to organise time, sequence content, and guide learner tasks, which supported purposeful and coherent teaching across subjects.

On the other hand, 47.5% of observed teachers lacked either a scheme of work, a lesson plan, or both, and in these cases, lessons relied on textbooks, memory, or improvised notes. Even where plans existed, some teachers struggled to complete them within the allocated time, which led to rushed endings or extended lessons beyond the period. Missing or partial planning reduced clarity of transitions, left learner activities loosely defined, and limited assessment opportunities. These gaps show inconsistent adherence to professional expectations and weaken the curriculum goal of structured, competency-oriented teaching.

- **Classroom control and management:** Most classrooms provided a basic level of physical safety. Many were clean, orderly, well lit, and sufficiently ventilated, with few visible hazards. Desks were typically arranged in clear rows with wide pathways that allowed easy movement. To sustain attention, teachers used direct questioning and randomly selected learners by name to keep everyone engaged. Simple rules such as raising hands before speaking and keeping noise low were commonly applied. Minor misbehaviour was usually managed through calm reminders, repositioning learners, or brief corrective guidance. Positive reinforcement was frequent, with teachers acknowledging effort and correct answers to maintain participation. Teacher–learner relationships were generally warm and respectful. Teachers offered support by moving closer to learners, listening carefully, and providing constructive responses. Corrections were made gently, without ridicule. In most classrooms, learners were comfortable asking questions and sharing ideas, contributing to a positive and trusting classroom climate. Conflicts, where they occurred, were infrequent and typically handled calmly. Teachers listened to both sides, encouraged dialogue, and used simple moral or social guidance to restore harmony. Clear rules and expectations at the start of lessons further prevented disagreements and helped maintain a conducive environment.

Despite this overall picture, important safety and management gaps remain. Some classrooms had broken windows, damaged furniture, roof leaks, dust, litter, and even wasps, yet teachers took no visible action to address these hazards. A few classes were overcrowded, with learners sharing desks beyond capacity or sitting on stones. These conditions reduced comfort, restricted teacher movement, and increased the risk of accidents. Large class sizes also amplified noise and off-task behaviour, making group work harder to supervise effectively. In a small number of lessons, teachers relied on harsh language or threats of physical punishment to maintain order. Such methods create fear, undermine trust, and conflict with rights-based discipline standards. Conflict resolution also remained largely teacher-led. Learners rarely took an active role in resolving disagreements, even minor ones. This limited involvement reduces opportunities for practicing empathy, negotiation, and shared problem-solving—skills that are essential for positive peer relationships.

- **Delivery and presentation:** Most teachers moved beyond lecturing and drew learners into activities. Group work was the main route for participation. Where it was well used, learners discussed, presented, and defended ideas. Pair tasks, demonstrations, role plays and classroom games were also used by some. Teachers used questioning, some invited questions and answered patiently, sometimes bouncing questions back to the whole class before adding clarification. Several lessons showed resourceful use of materials as teachers used charts, manila cards, seeds, cups, watering cans, glass blocks, dictionaries, religious books and science apparatus. In a few classes, learners handled materials directly during practical activities which supported hands-on understanding. Survey results showed high self-reported access and basic competence with ICT among teachers, with most respondents reporting having smartphones or computers and feeling able to search for and find educational resources online. A few teachers integrated ICT in their lessons through use of smartphones to show pictures, short videos, e-books, or to demonstrate internet searches. A small number of teachers used laptops for quizzes and research tasks, which raised engagement where observed. Additionally, several teachers grounded lessons in familiar experiences using relatable examples while a few lessons invited learners to share personal or family experiences and reflect on how new concepts connect to daily life, which strengthened relevance and ownership of learning.

However, several gaps emerged in how teachers deliver their lessons. Groups tended to stay fixed across subjects and lessons, rather than being formed with specific targets. Group work was often mechanical in practice, with groups copying from textbooks rather than discussing. This highlights a misunderstanding of the use of grouping as a technique. Participation remained strongly teacher-directed; chorus answers, reading aloud on request, and one-way questioning dominated many lessons. Learner questions were rare in some classrooms, sometimes because the opportunity never came, sometimes because only a small, confident minority felt free to speak. Some teachers involved only a few learners repeatedly while many remained silent, which undermines equity and meaningful learning. Many lessons relied heavily on textbooks, and even where additional materials were available, teachers often ignored them or used them only for demonstration. Learners mostly watched as teachers handled resources, and as a result, materials functioned more as visual support than as tools for active inquiry. Despite high self-reported ICT access and confidence, classroom use was limited and superficial. Most lessons involved no digital tools, and when ICT appeared, it was largely teacher-centred and reliant on teachers' personal phones, with minimal learner interaction. Some lessons showed no effort to connect new content to learners' everyday experiences, with teachers mainly following textbooks or dictating notes. Even when real-life links were made, they were rarely probed, leaving the connections superficial.

- Assessment:** Most teachers used a mix of formative and summative assessment strategies. End-of-topic tests were routine due to UNEB requirements; while questioning, short written tasks, group activities, practical demonstrations, and occasional peer feedback formed the core of classroom assessment. These strategies were often integrated into instruction, enabling continuous checks of understanding. In some lessons, teachers probed learners' reasoning, linked prompts to real-life experiences, and invited clarification questions. Group presentations provided insights into both individual and collective learning, and most teachers also used homework and research tasks. Teachers frequently used assessment results during lessons to correct errors and explain again to those who struggled. Feedback was typically immediate and oral, and some teachers used participation patterns to encourage wider engagement. Record keeping was strongest for formal assessments, with continuous assessment scores, end-of-topic tests, and exam results documented in performance books, learner files, or digital systems to inform promotion decisions, parent meetings, and reports. Overall, these practices reflected an understanding that assessment contributes to learning, not just grading.

On the contrary, several limitations were evident. Questioning was often dominated by recall-level, closed prompts that checked attentiveness rather than deeper understanding. In many lessons, learners did not ask questions, were not invited to do so, or only a small group engaged. Group work sometimes devolved into copying from textbooks, with limited teacher intervention to guide meaningful engagement. Peer and self-assessment were rare and typically informal. Some lessons relied almost entirely on oral questioning without written or practical tasks, which narrowed the range of skills assessed. Beyond this, the use of assessment information was inconsistent. Most teachers did not systematically record results from day-to-day classroom tasks which limited use of these records to adjust teaching, plan remedial support or track individual progress over time. In many classrooms, informal checks were discussed but not documented, resulting in useful real-time adjustments during lessons but weak long-term tracking and limited data-driven improvement outside the high-stakes UNEB requirements.

- Gender and inclusion:** Across the few classrooms with learners with disabilities, teachers generally promoted inclusion through practical adjustments—rearranging seating, enlarging board writing, allowing extra time, and involving these learners in questioning, group work, and demonstrations. Peers often supported classmates with disabilities, which strengthened a sense of belonging. Most teachers showed awareness of varied learning speeds and needs. They re-explained concepts, slowed the pace, checked understanding through targeted questions, and a few teachers occasionally adapted tasks for learners who struggled. Grouping strategies sometimes paired learners with difficulties with higher performing peers and even assigned them leadership roles, which supported both learning and confidence. Furthermore, most teachers showed clear intent to promote gender balance through alternating boys and girls when asking and answering questions, forming mixed-gender groups, and distributing leadership and presentation roles. Some teachers actively corrected imbalances, calling on underrepresented learners to take the lead. These efforts supported more equitable participation and interactions.

However, evidence of systematic identification, planning, and ongoing adaptation for learners with disabilities remained limited. Several classrooms still catered to the “average” learner, with teachers focusing more on active or front-row students and providing limited follow-through for those who stayed quiet, sat at the back, or showed persistent difficulty. In addition, subtle gender biases persisted. In some lessons, one gender dominated interactions. Group work often reinforced traditional roles, with girls pushed into secretarial roles and boys taking chair or moderator positions. Teachers rarely challenged these patterns, and efforts to address stereotypes or engage in deeper work on gender norms were limited, leaving practice largely at the level of balanced participation rather than truly gender-transformative teaching. Consequently, inclusive and differentiated practices were uneven across schools and subjects.

**Objective: To establish teachers’ understanding of the curriculum and how it informs teachers’ practices.**

**Primary schools:** Teachers showed strong awareness of the thematic curriculum and its focus on competencies, life skills, values, and practical learning. They described the curriculum as the main reference for lesson planning, selection of methods, use of materials, and assessment. Classroom observations confirmed use of varied assessment methods and immediate feedback, which aligns with curriculum expectations. Headteachers reported structures that support curriculum understanding, including academic committees, peer mentoring, joint scheme-of-work preparation, and occasional refresher workshops led by CCTs and district teams. These school-level processes reinforce curriculum use in planning and teaching.

At the same time, important gaps appeared between stated understanding and daily practice. Some teachers struggle to interpret parts of the competency-based curriculum and ask for more guidance and repeated training. Observations showed weak documentation of learner performance and limited use of cumulative records, which reduces teachers’ ability to track progress and design timely support. Planning and preparation practices were not uniform across all teachers observed.

System-level constraints further limit effective implementation. Teachers reported few or outdated curriculum copies, misalignment between textbooks and curriculum content, and lack of reference books in some subjects. Language of instruction also affects curriculum delivery. In lower primary, teachers who do not speak the local language, and multilingual refugee settings where one common local language is not possible, find it hard to follow language provisions. In some schools, teaching in a local language while assessing in English contradicts curriculum guidance and creates confusion for learners, reducing their opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned.

**Secondary schools:** Teachers demonstrated a solid theoretical understanding of the competence-based secondary curriculum; its learning outcomes, generic skills, learner-centred pedagogy, and continuous assessment. This knowledge was reinforced by school-based workshops, peer mentorship, departmental meetings, and occasional external trainings. However, translation into daily practice remained limited. Observations showed that slightly over half of the teachers had both schemes of work and lesson plans available, and more than a quarter had neither, while record keeping of learners’ assessments was rare. Many lessons relied heavily on textbooks, note dictation, and whole-class teaching, leaving learners largely passive. Heavy workloads, large class sizes, and staffing gaps further constrained planning and reduced the use of learner-centred methods. Teachers reported handling 30–40 periods per week, well above national guidance, leaving little time for preparation, research, or reflection, and negatively affecting wellbeing.

Teachers and headteachers also noted persistent gaps in curriculum understanding and alignment across planning, assessment, and project work. Cascade training did not result in orientation of all teachers. As a result, several were unsure how to design tasks, integrate competencies, or align continuous assessment with curriculum expectations. Misunderstandings about the weighting of school-based assessment were revealed. Teachers struggled to set appropriate scenario-based questions and to link project work to subject content and step-by-step inquiry. Many still viewed projects as stand-alone practical activities rather than structured learning tasks built around clear outcomes.

Teacher beliefs and wider system conditions further shaped practice. Some teachers doubted that learners, especially those from rural backgrounds or with limited English proficiency, could take active roles, and feared that learner-centred approaches would slow syllabus coverage. Facilitation was at times misinterpreted as stepping back entirely, and observations showed teachers withdrawing during group work without providing structure or support. Resource constraints compounded these challenges with many schools lacking ICT tools, electricity, or staff with digital literacy, limiting the intended use of technology. Shortages and delays in textbooks and reference materials, uncertainty about publisher alignment, and overcrowded classrooms added

to implementation barriers. Salary disparities between science and arts teachers further affected morale and collaboration.

***Objective: To establish language support strategies used by teachers to promote learning in schools.***

**Primary schools:** Teachers in work in highly multilingual classrooms where English as the official language of instruction often hinders learning, especially for younger learners and those without nursery experience. They frequently use a mix of strategies such as visual aids, gestures, real objects, peer and teacher translation between English and familiar languages, co-curricular activities such as debates and public speaking help strengthen expressive skills and build confidence in English, multilingual instruction, simplified language, and repetition. A few schools draw on resource persons to support translation, but most strategies remain dependant on individual teachers. Additionally, some schools promote English-only use across all classrooms, including punitive measures for local language use, in the name of fairness and unity. Such approaches risk reducing comprehension, muting learners with weaker English, and widening learning gaps for learners who depend on familiar languages. Classroom observations showed blended use of English and local languages, some use of realia, questioning, and occasional peer collaboration, yet many of the strategies described in discussions appeared uneven in practice.

**Secondary schools:** Teachers rely strongly on English as the main medium of communication inside and outside classrooms, with school policies promoting it both as a unifying language in highly multilingual settings and as curriculum requirement. In some schools, use any other language besides English is discouraged and punishable. Only a few teachers supplement English with peer translation, occasional use of Kiswahili or local languages, visual aids, gestures, classroom, real-life objects, displays, questioning techniques, and structured peer support groups, and these strategies are not routine. Classroom observations confirm limited use of such scaffolding, revealing a mismatch between learners' linguistic diversity and largely monolingual instructional practices. Limited linguistic scaffolding places learners with low English proficiency at risk of confusion, reduced participation, and slower progress for those who need additional language support.

## **4.2 Conclusions**

The study aimed to assess the teaching and learning situation of primary and secondary school teachers in both refugee and non-refugee settings across Uganda's West Nile and Karamoja sub-regions. The study provided a comprehensive picture of teachers' strengths and gaps across curriculum understanding and implementation; professional growth and well-being; child protection, inclusion, and well-being practices; classroom management, instruction and assessment practices; and language support strategies.

The study was conducted in 204 schools (145 primary and 59 secondary), involving 1,716 teachers (1,151 primary and 565 secondary) across six districts in West Nile and Karamoja. Participating teachers were predominantly male (65.9%), with a similar pattern observed among primary school teachers (64.5%) and secondary school teachers (68.9%). Among primary school teachers, the average age was 39.0 years (range: 20–61). They had taught for an average of 15.1 years (range: 1–42) and had spent an average of 4.7 years at their current school (range: 1–30). The majority (92.4%) held qualifications below a bachelor's degree. Among secondary school teachers, the average age was 34.5 years (range: 20–65). They had taught for an average of 9.9 years (range: 1–41) and had been at their current school for an average of 4.2 years (range: 1–28). Nearly half (45.6%) held qualifications below a bachelor's degree.

Across primary and secondary levels, the study reveals a mix of strong practices and areas requiring urgent support across both primary and secondary levels. Strong leadership, collaboration, community relations, and mentorship reflected professional identities rooted in mutual help, reflective practice, and concern for learner wellbeing—even in resource-constrained settings—thereby enhancing supportive teaching environments. Though most schools employed active and multilayered practices to promote child protection, wellbeing, and inclusion, such as counselling, referrals, and co-curricular clubs supporting vulnerable learners, there was limited evidence of deliberate efforts to engage learners in critical reflection on gender norms, stereotypes, and power relations. Teachers and headteachers often framed supervision as supportive rather than punitive, and female teachers, in particular, appeared to anchor communication with parents and communities. The presence of both male and female teachers within schools also appeared to strengthen the social and emotional support available to learners and contributed to school environments that more closely reflected the diversity of wider society.

Pedagogical practice showed a blend of strength and constraint with most teachers engaged in meticulous planning, maintained generally safe and orderly learning environments, used questioning, group work, and written exercises, and drew on local examples and materials to support understanding. Where these elements came together, learners experienced structured lessons, warm relationships, and ongoing feedback. However, uneven application across classrooms, continued use of corporal punishment, and residual gender bias in participation and role assignment showed rights based and gender responsive practice remained incomplete, despite clear evidence that both male and female teachers were contributing meaningfully to learner participation, support, and classroom engagement.

Teachers demonstrated visible efforts to promote gender balance and include learners with disabilities through practical classroom adjustments, mixed-ability and mixed-gender grouping, deliberate turn-taking, and targeted support for slower learners. In several cases, these strategies strengthened participation, confidence, and a sense of belonging. The findings further suggest that gender-balanced school environments can support more inclusive learner experiences by providing both girls and boys with diverse role models and opportunities for equitable participation. However, such practices were largely driven by individual teacher initiative rather than systematic identification, structured planning, or sustained adaptation. Most classrooms continued to cater to the “average” learner, with limited follow-through for learners who were quiet, struggling, or seated at the back. Subtle gender biases also persisted, including uneven participation patterns and the reinforcement of traditional roles during group work, with limited explicit challenge to stereotypes. While inclusive and gender-responsive practices were present, they remained uneven, inconsistently applied, and rarely transformative in depth.

Awareness of both formative and summative assessment approaches was demonstrated by both primary and secondary school teachers, employing a mix of questioning, written tasks, group activities, practical demonstrations, and end-of-topic tests. In several classrooms, feedback was immediate, errors were corrected constructively, and assessment outcomes were used to re-teach content, plan remedial support, and motivate learners. At secondary level, more structured documentation—often aligned to Uganda National Examinations Board requirements—strengthened record keeping for formal assessments. However, classroom assessment practices were frequently limited to recall-level questioning, with few opportunities for higher-order reasoning, learner inquiry, or systematic peer and self-assessment. Informal checks for understanding were common but rarely documented, weakening longitudinal tracking of individual progress.

Curriculum understanding showed significant gaps in daily practice, especially at secondary level. Teachers faced challenges in interpreting the curriculum, translating it into clearly defined learner activities, and aligning lesson planning and schemes of work accordingly. Heavy workloads, partial training coverage, material shortages, negative attitudes, and uncertainty around assessment requirements further hindered full adoption of competence-based approaches. Language practices also highlighted a tension between policy and learning needs. Teachers at both levels relied heavily on English, often under strict school rules, despite learners’ diverse linguistic backgrounds and uneven exposure to the language. Many primary teachers used translation, local languages, and realia to support comprehension, but these strategies were inconsistent. Secondary classrooms offered even less scaffolding, raising concerns about participation and achievement for learners with weaker English proficiency.

Overall, the findings point to a stable and committed teaching force with valuable informal support systems and promising practices, operating within structural, pedagogical, and linguistic constraints that limit consistent delivery of inclusive, learner-centred, competency-oriented education. There is need to focus on stronger systematic planning, positive and rights-based classroom management, meaningful assessment and record keeping, gender transformative and disability responsive pedagogy, curriculum implementation support, and language scaffolding, so that gains in teacher motivation and collaboration translate more reliably into improved learning outcomes for all learners. Efforts to promote gender-balanced teaching workforces should also be strengthened, as the findings demonstrate the important and complementary contributions of both female and male teachers to inclusive and supportive learning environments.

### 4.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

*Strengthen implementation of continuous professional development:* Schools should institutionalise structured peer support and teacher reflection mechanisms as core components of continuous professional development. Regular departmental reflection meetings, peer observation and feedback, mentoring relationships, and collaborative lesson planning can provide timely, context-specific, and low-cost professional learning opportunities. Embedding these practices within school routines will promote shared problem-solving, collective accountability, and sustained instructional improvement. School leadership should formalise induction and mentoring processes for new teachers and ensure supportive supervision that reinforces reflective practice. District Education Officers and inspectors of schools should complement these efforts through regular monitoring visits and targeted technical support that builds school capacity, rather than displacing peer-led professional learning.

*Increase awareness of child protection mechanisms and referral pathways:* Schools should provide periodic refresher training for staff, senior women/men teachers, child protection focal persons, PTA, SMC, and BOG members on child protection guidelines, case documentation, and referral processes. Roles for prevention, case follow up, and feedback to learners and families should be clearly communicated and documented.

*Improve implementation of policies that promote learner-friendly environments:* District education officials should sensitise headteachers and teachers on existing laws and policies such as the Children Act 2016 (Amended) and related MoES guidelines such as the teachers' code of conduct. Headteachers should lead school-wide agreements that replace corporal practices with clear rules, positive discipline, and restorative conversations. Training and ongoing coaching should support teachers to use non-violent behaviour management, including clear routines, proactive reminders, movement around class, and restorative dialogue, so that harsh tones, intimidation, and corporal punishment seen in some lessons give way to safe, trusting relationships.

*Reinforce minimum standards for planning and preparation:* Headteachers, supported by Directors of Studies or Academic Masters/Mistresses, should require up-to-date schemes of work and lesson plans for every teacher and every lesson and link internal support supervision to review of these documents. Team or departmental planning sessions should be encouraged to allow peer support for lesson design, assessment planning, and alignment with curriculum guidelines.

*Deepen gender-transformative and inclusive classroom practices:* Teachers need targeted support to identify learners with disabilities and those with persistent learning difficulties and to record specific adaptations in seating, pace, and support. Teachers should also monitor participation, group roles, and leadership opportunities so that no gender or learner category dominates. Lesson content and classroom dialogue should be used deliberately to question rigid gender expectations and to challenge stereotypes and traditional norms

*Enhance teachers' capacity to deliver the competency-based curriculum:* Since many teachers still struggle to interpret and implement the competence-based curriculum, there's need provide targeted training for teachers, especially those who have not yet received adequate guidance. A different delivery model from the current cascade approach should be adopted by NCDC to expand reach and quality. Priority areas should include assessment for learning and systematic record keeping, handling of project work, planning and preparation, use of learner and teacher guides, and ICT integration. At school level, structured and periodic refresher sessions and peer mentorship should reinforce this understanding and link it directly to classroom practice.

*Strengthen teachers' capacity to promote learner-led conflict resolution:* Teachers should be supported to facilitate, rather than dominate, conflict-resolution processes in the classroom. This can include training on structured peer mediation, guided classroom discussion protocols, and activities that allow learners to practice empathy, negotiation, and collaborative problem-solving. By enabling learners to take an active role in resolving disagreements, teachers can foster positive peer relationships and strengthen social-emotional skills.

*Address workload and staffing constraints that limit curriculum delivery:* The MoES needs to review staffing norms, with special attention to rural and hard-to-reach schools where teachers reported 30–40 periods per week. Schools should redistribute non-teaching tasks more fairly so teachers retain time for preparation, research, and feedback. District Inspectors of Schools should regularly follow up on adherence to staffing guidelines. In addition, remuneration gaps, especially between different subject categories, need to be addressed because these gaps undermine staff cohesion and place learners at risk of inconsistent and poor-quality teaching.

*Retool teachers in ICT for lesson delivery:* Given the minimal use of ICT in lesson delivery and the professed gaps, schools should strengthen teachers' knowledge and skills in digital pedagogy. Training should focus on simple, practical strategies for integrating ICT into planning and classroom delivery. Schools should introduce clear ICT routines, agreed guidelines for safe use of personal devices, and structured support for integrating short videos, images, simulations, or e-books into lessons in ways that involve learners, not only teachers.

*Clarify and support context-appropriate language policies:* Schools should adopt and promote flexible language practices that prioritise learner understanding rather than rigid "English only" rules. Teachers need capacity building on practical language support strategies such as think–pair–share, role play, short group discussions, and structured peer translation, which lower language anxiety and build confidence for learners with weaker English proficiency. Support could also include bilingual instructional materials and guidance for scaffolding content when teachers do not speak learners' home languages. Furthermore, the language of instruction should be aligned with assessment to avoid confusion and ensure learners can fully demonstrate their understanding. Tailored support for multilingual classrooms will enable teachers to implement the curriculum effectively and improve learning outcomes.

*Ensure availability of sufficient reference materials and resources:* Since inadequate textbooks, curriculum copies, and reference materials hindered preparation in many schools, headteachers should prioritise procurement of enough learner and teacher guides for all subjects. NCDC should ensure timely distribution of curriculum materials and, where possible, issue guidance on publishers whose textbooks align with curriculum expectations to steer school procurement. Alongside print materials, schools should plan for basic ICT resources, including secure storage and maintenance, to support both curriculum implementation and the ICT-related expectations of the competence-based approach.

*Provide deliberate social and emotional support to teachers:* Headteachers should integrate short wellbeing check-ins in staff meetings, encourage simple low-cost social events, and promote supportive staff norms so that emotional support becomes a standard feature of school culture rather than limited to a few schools. Establishing peer support systems and teacher learning circles can provide ongoing, context-specific opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and shared problem-solving. These practices help teachers manage stress, sustain motivation, and strengthen professional relationships.

*Promote gender-balanced teacher recruitment, deployment, and retention:* The MoES and district education authorities should strengthen efforts to ensure balanced representation of female and male teachers across schools, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas. Gender-balanced teaching staff can provide learners with diverse role models, strengthen learner support systems, and contribute to school environments that reflect the wider society. Strategies should include improving working and accommodation conditions for teachers in underserved areas, supporting female teacher retention and progression into leadership roles, and monitoring gender distribution within the teaching workforce to promote equitable representation.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: How primary school teachers leverage ICT to support teaching and learning

|                                                                     | Karamoja |      |       | West Nile |      |       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------|-------|-----------|------|-------|
|                                                                     | Female   | Male | Total | Female    | Male | Total |
| Using ICT ...                                                       | Percent  |      |       |           |      |       |
| ... to create lesson materials                                      | 44.9     | 52.2 | 49.7  | 43.8      | 50.5 | 48.3  |
| ... to promote collaboration among learners                         | 53.1     | 44.6 | 47.5  | 34.1      | 38.9 | 37.3  |
| ... for assessment (e.g., online quizzes, digital portfolios, etc.) | 38.8     | 33.7 | 35.5  | 30.4      | 29.6 | 29.9  |
| <i>N = 800 (Karamoja = 141; West Nile = 659)</i>                    |          |      |       |           |      |       |

### Appendix 2: How secondary school teachers leverage ICT to support teaching and learning

|                                                                     | Karamoja |      |       | West Nile |      |       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------|-------|-----------|------|-------|
|                                                                     | Female   | Male | Total | Female    | Male | Total |
| Using ICT ...                                                       | Percent  |      |       |           |      |       |
| ... to create lesson materials                                      | 78.6     | 66.1 | 70.1  | 84.2      | 83.2 | 83.5  |
| ... to promote collaboration among learners                         | 64.3     | 59.3 | 60.9  | 74.1      | 75.9 | 75.3  |
| ... for assessment (e.g., online quizzes, digital portfolios, etc.) | 46.4     | 44.1 | 44.8  | 53.2      | 51.5 | 52.0  |
| <i>N = 529 (Karamoja = 87; West Nile = 442)</i>                     |          |      |       |           |      |       |





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