Uwezo UGANDA

PAL NETWORK
People's Action for Learning



International Common Assessment of Numeracy and Reading (ICAN–ICAR)

Uganda Country Report 2025

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About the data

The data in this report comes from the 2025 ICAN–ICAR household assessment in Uganda, carried out by Uwezo Uganda as part of the PAL Network's 2025 ICAN–ICAR cycle. The PAL Network's ICAN–ICAR 2025 dataset is available through DataFirst, University of Cape Town (https://doi.org/10.25828/ah42-xw77).

For more information

Uwezo Uganda, Corner House, Suite B1, Plot 436/437, Mawanda Road, Kamwokya, P.O. Box 33275, Kampala, Uganda. Website: www.uwezouganda.org. Email: info@uwezouganda.org

PAL Network, Daykio Plaza, First Floor, Room 1.5, Ngong Lane, Nairobi, Kenya. Website: www.palnetwork.org. Email: info@palnetwork.org

Foreword

Every child in Uganda deserves to leave the early years of primary school able to read with understanding and to work confidently with numbers. These foundational skills are the base on which all later learning, and much of a child's future, is built. This report sets out what the 2025 International Common Assessment of Numeracy and Reading (ICAN–ICAR) tells us about how close Uganda is to that goal.

The assessment was carried out by Uwezo Uganda as part of the PAL Network's first multi-country ICAN–ICAR cycle, which covered eleven countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas. In Uganda, trained citizen volunteers visited 4,363 households in 222 enumeration areas across all 15 subregions and assessed 8,883 children aged 5 to 16, both in school and out of school. Because the assessment takes place in the home, it includes children who are often missed by school-based assessments: those who have never enrolled, those who have dropped out and those who attend irregularly. The results are reported against globally agreed minimum proficiency levels, which allows Uganda to report on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 4.1.1(a) using data that is comparable with that of other countries. For Uwezo Uganda, whose work focuses on children's literacy, numeracy, and life skills and values, ICAN–ICAR adds internationally comparable evidence on the first two.

The central lesson of this report is clear. Ugandan children are much closer to foundational numeracy than to foundational reading. Nationally, about one in three 10-year-olds (34.4%) reached the minimum proficiency level in mathematics, but only 4.3% reached it in reading. Reading is therefore the main barrier to foundational learning in Uganda. The report also shows that learning is deeply unequal. Children in rural areas, children from poorer households, children who are out of school and children who do not speak English at home are far less likely to reach the benchmarks, and these disadvantages often affect the same children.

These findings are a call to act together. We invite the Ministry of Education and Sports and its agencies to place early reading at the centre of the curriculum, teacher support and resource allocation, and to use both age-based and class-based results to track progress. We encourage teachers to give every child daily opportunities to read with understanding. We urge parents and caregivers to take an active interest in their children's learning, to help with homework and to keep children in school. We call on development partners, civil society and communities to direct support to the subregions and children who are furthest behind.

We are grateful to the families who opened their homes to the assessment, and to everyone who made this work possible. We hope that this report will inform policy and practice, so that every child in Uganda gains the foundations needed for lifelong learning.

Mary Goretti Nakabugo
Executive Director, Uwezo Uganda

Armando Ali
Chief Executive Officer, PAL Network

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We are deeply grateful to the 413 citizen volunteers who carried out the assessment in households across all 15 subregions, often reaching remote and underserved communities, and to the 28 local partner organisations whose mobilisation made the fieldwork possible (listed in Annex 3). We thank the local leaders, village elders, community representatives and parents who welcomed the teams and supported the process at every step.

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Finally, we thank every child who took part in ICAN–ICAR, including those who are out of school or who attend irregularly. Their participation is the foundation on which this report stands. While we are grateful for all the support received, responsibility for this report rests with Uwezo Uganda and the PAL Network.

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List of Acronyms

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
CI	Confidence Interval
CLA	Citizen-led Assessment
D4FL	Data for Foundational Learning
EA	Enumeration Area
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GEM	Global Education Monitoring Report
GPF	Global Proficiency Framework
HHID	Household Identifier
ICAN	International Common Assessment of Numeracy
ICAR	International Common Assessment of Reading
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MPL	Minimum Proficiency Level
NCDC	National Curriculum Development Centre
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
P1–P7	Primary One to Primary Seven (P4 = Primary Four)
PAL	People's Action for Learning Network
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
PPPS	Probability Proportional to Population Size
S1–S2	Senior One to Senior Two
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SES	Socioeconomic Status
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee (Uwezo Uganda)
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNEB	Uganda National Examinations Board
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Summary

Introduction

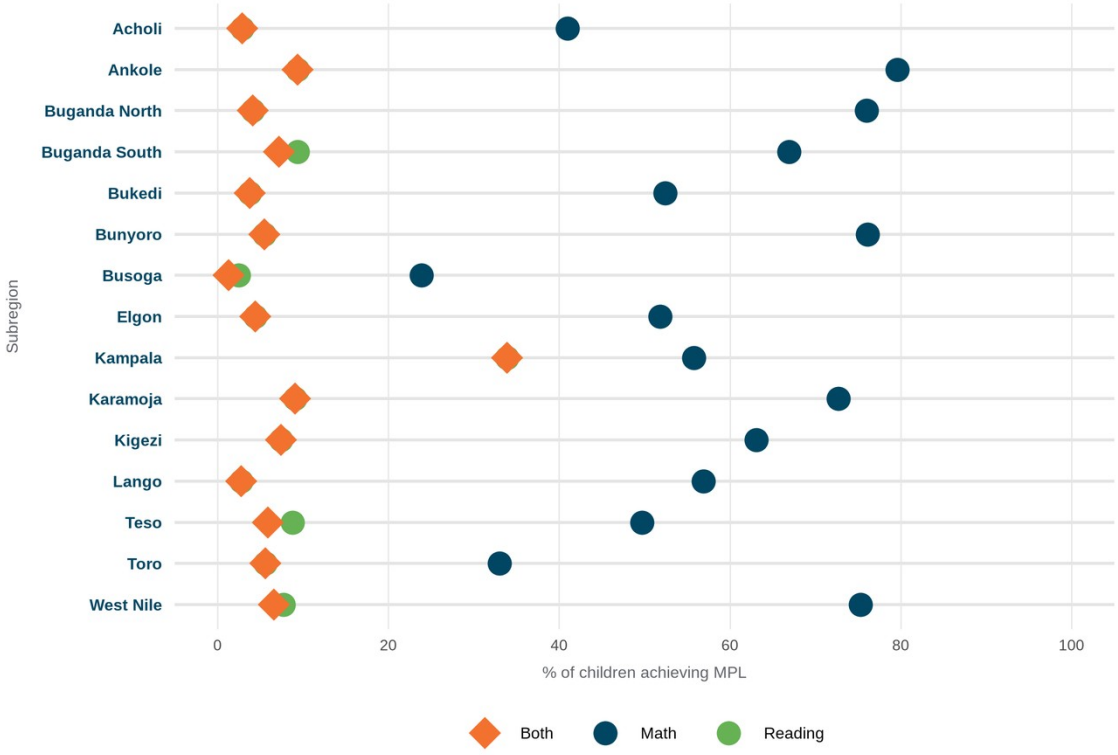
Foundational literacy and numeracy are the base on which every later stage of learning is built, yet Uganda's evidence base has long shown that years of schooling do not automatically translate into these skills. This report presents results from the 2025 International Common Assessment of Numeracy (ICAN) and the International Common Assessment of Reading (ICAR). These are household-based, internationally comparable assessments of reading and mathematics. They were administered to 8,883 children aged 5 to 16 years in 4,363 households across 222 enumeration areas in all 15 subregions of Uganda between August and September 2025. Because it was conducted in households rather than schools, the assessment captured learning outcomes for enrolled and non-enrolled children alike, providing a fuller national picture than school-based testing. Results are reported against internationally defined Minimum Proficiency Levels (MPLs) for both Primary Four (P4) pupils and all 10-year-olds, the latter including children who are over-age, under-age, or out of school. Nationally, 34.4% of 10-year-olds reached the minimum proficiency level in mathematics, but only 4.3% reached it in reading (PAL Network, 2026a).

Findings

Reading Is the Main Barrier

Across Uganda, more children reach the minimum proficiency level in mathematics than in reading, both at age 10 and in P4. Among 10-year-olds, the share reaching the mathematics benchmark ranges from 12.3% in Busoga to 57.8% in Kampala, while the share reaching the reading benchmark is 5% or less in ten of the fifteen subregions. Among Primary Four (P4) pupils, more than half reach the mathematics benchmark in eleven subregions, but fewer than 10% reach the reading benchmark in every subregion except Kampala (33.9%) (see Figure 1). Because the share of children who reach the benchmark in both subjects closely follows reading, weak reading, not numeracy, is the main barrier keeping most Ugandan children from reaching foundational learning benchmarks.

Figure 1: Percentage of P4 Pupils Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Subregion



Enrolment and Progression through School Matter More Than Age Alone

Proficiency rises much more sharply from one class to the next than from one age to the next. This suggests that staying in school and progressing through it, and not simply growing older, is linked to learning. Children aged 10 to 14 who were not enrolled in school were far less likely than enrolled children to reach the benchmarks in mathematics, reading or both (their odds were about one-fifth of those of enrolled children). This shows that preventing dropout, helping children return to school and supporting regular attendance should be treated as ways of improving learning in their own right, and not only as ways of improving access.

Location and Wealth Matter Much More Than Gender

Differences between girls and boys are small, vary in direction across subregions and are much smaller than other gaps. Location and household wealth matter far more. Among P4 pupils, 9.8% of urban children reached the minimum proficiency level in both reading and mathematics, compared with 3.8% of rural children (PAL Network, 2026a). Among 10-year-olds, urban children were more than three times as likely as rural children to reach the reading benchmark. Wealth gaps are even larger: 21.6% of children from the wealthiest fifth of households reached the benchmark in both subjects, compared with 1.6% of children from the poorest fifth. Children who speak English, the language of assessment, at home also do much better (10.3% of P4 pupils reached both benchmarks, compared with 3.1% of those who do not), as do children with at least one parent who completed primary school (13.2% compared with 3.5%) and children who receive help with homework (11.7% compared with 6.6%) (PAL Network, 2026a). These disadvantages tend to overlap. The same children are often rural, poor, out of school and do not speak English at home, which points to shared causes such as poverty, location and access to school rather than any single factor.

Implications for Policy and Programming

The Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), should prioritise reading in the curriculum, teacher training and resource allocation, particularly in the ten or more subregions where fewer than 10% of children reach the reading benchmark. Government should also treat keeping children in school and helping them return as ways of improving learning, direct resources to the subregions that need them most rather than spreading them evenly, and report both age-10 and P4 estimates for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 4.1.1(a), since each tells a different story.

NGOs and partners should expand household- and community-level literacy support (only about 32% of children have any reading materials at home and 19% have children's books) and combine literacy programmes with efforts to address the shortage of resources in poorer communities. These partners should prioritise the subregions with the largest gaps linked to home language, and design catch-up or community-based models that tackle overlapping barriers (living in rural areas, poverty and being out of school) together.

Conclusion

Ugandan children are, on average, closer to achieving foundational numeracy than foundational literacy, and the reading gap is the central obstacle to improving overall learning outcomes. Gaps linked to household wealth and school enrolment are large and consistent, gaps between places are large but vary from one subregion to another, and gaps between girls and boys are small. Closing Uganda's foundational learning gap will require sustained attention to reading instruction, targeted support for rural and poorer communities, and strategies that keep children enrolled and progressing through school, recognising that the children furthest behind are often disadvantaged in more than one way. Continued monitoring through future ICAN–ICAR rounds, together with more detailed subregional analysis, will be essential for tracking progress and directing resources to the children who need them most.

1. Introduction: Why Foundational Learning Matters in Uganda

Foundational learning, the ability to read with understanding and to handle basic numeracy by the end of the lower primary cycle, is the base on which every other stage of education and, ultimately, a country's human capital is built. A child who cannot decode a simple sentence or solve a basic arithmetic problem by Primary Three is unlikely to keep pace with the curriculum in the years that follow, however many years they remain enrolled in school.

In Uganda, despite large investments in access through Universal Primary Education, actual years of schooling fall well short of what the system promises. A 2024 UNICEF policy note on education in Uganda notes that while children are expected to receive around 11.5 years of education, the average years actually completed stood at just 6.2 in 2022, roughly Primary Six, with the gap widest in regions such as Karamoja and West Nile (UNICEF Uganda, 2024).

Years in school, however, do not translate into learning on their own. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data for Uganda, based on the most recent international assessment available (2013), shows only 50.5% of pupils reaching minimum proficiency in reading by the end of primary school, and just 20.7% reaching minimum proficiency in mathematics. These levels fall far short of Uganda's national SDG 4 benchmarks for 2025 of 72% in reading and 68% in mathematics (UIS, n.d.). Uwezo Uganda's household-based learning assessments, which have tracked children's basic literacy and numeracy since 2010, found in 2024 that only about one in ten Primary Three (P3) pupils could read and comprehend a Primary Two-level English and local language story, and only about three in ten P3 pupils could do tasks involving all four arithmetic operations (Uwezo Uganda, 2024). Regional disparities are stark, with children in the Central Region reading at a substantially higher level than children in other regions (Uwezo Uganda, 2024).

The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report's Spotlight on Uganda examined how well the country's curriculum, textbooks, teacher guides and assessments align to build early-grade skills (UNESCO, 2024). The report found genuine strengths: Uganda's Early Grade Reading programme covered about 80% of public primary schools and around 6 million pupils, and improved learning outcomes at Primary Three, supported by the Teacher Development Management System and Cluster Coordinating Tutors. At the same time, the report pointed to persistent gaps, including overcrowded classrooms and shortages of teachers and materials, and called for a clearer national vision for literacy and numeracy backed by stronger assessment and teacher support.

Taken together, this evidence points to the same conclusion from different angles: Uganda has made real progress on access to primary education, but foundational literacy and numeracy remain the binding constraint on what that access delivers. This ICAN-ICAR country report responds directly to that gap, presenting minimum proficiency level outcomes in reading, mathematics, and both combined for 8,883 children across Uganda's 15 subregions. This evidence is intended to sharpen this national picture and to inform where investment in foundational learning is most needed.

2. About the ICAN–ICAR Assessment

2.1 What is ICAN–ICAR?

The International Common Assessments of Numeracy (ICAN) and Reading (ICAR) are internationally comparable assessments developed by the People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network to measure foundational numeracy and literacy among children aged 5–16 years. Building on the Citizen-Led Assessment (CLA) approach pioneered through initiatives such as ASER and Uwezo, ICAN–ICAR was designed to retain the strengths of household-based assessments while enabling valid comparisons across countries. The assessments provide simple, low-cost, and scalable tools that generate reliable data on foundational learning, including for children who are often excluded from school-based assessments.

ICAN assesses foundational numeracy through tasks covering number knowledge, basic operations, measurement, geometry, data handling, and pattern recognition. ICAR measures foundational reading through oral language comprehension, decoding (letter sounds and word recognition), and reading comprehension. Both assessments are administered individually using adaptive "stop rules," allowing children to complete only tasks appropriate to their skill level while minimising fatigue and frustration.

A defining feature of ICAN–ICAR is its alignment with internationally recognised learning standards. The assessments are mapped to the Global Proficiency Framework (GPF) (ACER, 2022; UIS et al., 2020) and have been reviewed against the technical requirements for reporting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator 4.1.1(a), which measures the proportion of children achieving at least the Minimum Proficiency Level (MPL) in reading and mathematics by the end of lower primary. Through an international standard-setting process using the Pairwise Comparison Method, MPL cut-points were established for both assessments, enabling countries to report learning outcomes using globally comparable benchmarks while maintaining local relevance through careful adaptation into national languages. In Uganda, the assessment was conducted in English (PAL Network, 2025).

2.2 Why Household-Based Assessment?

Unlike traditional school-based assessments, ICAN–ICAR is conducted in households, allowing it to capture learning outcomes for all children aged 5–16 years, regardless of whether they are enrolled in school. This approach ensures that out-of-school children, irregular attenders, over-age learners, and other marginalised groups are included in national estimates of foundational learning. As a result, the findings provide a more complete picture of children's learning than assessments that only include students attending school on the day of testing.

The assessment is administered one-on-one by trained enumerators using paper-based assessment booklets while responses are recorded digitally. This oral format is particularly appropriate for young children and those with emerging literacy skills because it allows assessors to observe children's abilities directly rather than relying on written responses. The adaptive design further ensures that children are only asked questions appropriate to their demonstrated skill level.

To ensure accessibility and fairness, ICAN–ICAR is translated and adapted into local languages using a structured process that includes forward translation, back translation, expert review, and cultural adaptation. Enumerators are recruited locally whenever possible,

enabling assessments to be administered in languages familiar to children and their communities. Together, the household-based approach, multilingual administration, and individualised assessment format provide inclusive, high-quality data that accurately reflect foundational learning across diverse populations.

3. Sampling Design, Data Collection, and Limitations in Uganda

3.1 Sampling Strategy

The ICAN–ICAR assessment employed a nationally representative, probability-based sampling design to produce reliable estimates of foundational learning among children aged 5–16 years. The sampling followed a two-stage, stratified design. The sampling frame was the 2024 National Population and Housing Census (UBOS, 2024), and the sample was stratified by Uganda's 15 subregions and by urban and rural areas. In the first stage, 222 Enumeration Areas (EAs) were selected using Probability Proportional to Population Size (PPPS). This means larger EAs had a greater chance of selection, while the sample remained nationally representative. The EAs were selected from the census frame in with the support of Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS). In the second stage, local partner organisations generated a list of all households in each selected EA and then used systematic random sampling to select 20 households per EA. This gave a target of about 4,440 households, and 4,363 households were visited. Only households with at least one child aged 5 to 16 years were assessed. Refugee settlements and forest reserves were not included in the sampling frame (PAL Network, 2026b).

This design ensured representation of both urban and rural populations and enabled inclusion of all eligible children residing in sampled households, regardless of school attendance. Each household was given a weight based on its chance of being selected, adjusted for households and children who could not be assessed. Using these weights means that the results represent all children aged 5 to 16 in Uganda, not only those in the sample (PAL Network, 2026b).

3.2 Field Implementation

Data collection in Uganda was conducted from 26 August to 15 September 2025, following standardised PAL Network protocols used across participating countries. For ICAR, the language of assessment was designed to match the official language. For Uganda, the reading assessment was delivered in English.

Enumerators participated in a structured training programme delivered through PAL Network's training cascade, in which national Project Management Teams trained master trainers, who in turn prepared field enumerators. The training covered assessment administration, household interviewing procedures, ethical conduct, scoring protocols, and digital data collection using SurveyCTO. In Uganda, 413 citizen volunteers were mobilised as enumerators through 28 local partner organisations, and 18 enumerator trainings were held (PAL Network, 2026a).

Quality assurance procedures were implemented throughout data collection. These included real-time monitoring of uploaded data, field supervision, inter-rater reliability checks, structured household-based verification visits, and systematic data quality reviews. Together, these measures helped ensure that assessment procedures were implemented consistently

and that the resulting data was reliable and comparable both nationally and across participating countries.

3.3 Sample Overview

Table 1: Uganda Sample

Indicator	Uganda
Enumeration Areas	222
Households Surveyed	4,363
Children Surveyed	9,531
Children Assessed	8,883

Source: ICAN–ICAR 2025 data for Uganda (see also PAL Network, 2026b).

In Uganda, teams selected households from 222 enumeration areas and visited 4,363 households. Of the 9,531 children surveyed in these households, 8,883 completed the ICAN–ICAR assessment. This data was then weighted to represent all children aged 5 to 16 in Uganda. Table 1 shows these sample numbers, and Table 2 shows the number of children assessed in each subregion. Kampala has the smallest sample (82 children of all ages), so results for Kampala should be read with caution.

Table 2: Number of Children Assessed, by Subregion and Gender

Subregion	Girls	Boys
Acholi	207	248
Ankole	331	367
Buganda North	684	649
Buganda South	455	458
Bukedi	322	336
Bunyoro	224	189
Busoga	292	282
Elgon	340	356
Kampala	43	39
Karamoja	160	126
Kigezi	194	200
Lango	264	299
Teso	213	170
Toro	322	273
West Nile	393	447
Total	4,444	4,439

Note: The table shows the unweighted number of children of all ages who were assessed in each subregion. The figures add up to 8,883 children assessed overall. The numbers of 10-year-olds and P4 pupils in each subregion are much smaller, especially in Kampala.

3.4 Limitations

While the ICAN/ICAR study was designed, implemented, and analysed with the utmost attention to rigour, standardisation across contexts, and appropriate contextualisation, some limitations exist. First, while the sample size is large enough to confidently draw conclusions at the country and even the subregional level, once data is divided in more than one way (for example, by subregion and gender), some group sizes become rather small. Table 2, which shows the gender breakdown by region, illustrates this reality, where sample sizes for some regions are still robust, and the sample sizes for others (for example, Kampala, with 82 children) are relatively small. Caution should therefore be taken when drawing conclusions from very small groups, and this report points out where a result rests on very few children.

Further, because the study was designed to take a snapshot of children's foundational skills at the point of assessment, the links reported below show which factors go together with learning. They cannot show that one factor causes another.

Care is taken in the report below to clarify the weight of conclusions as well as their interpretation.

4. Understanding Learning Benchmarks

ICAN–ICAR reports children's learning in relation to internationally defined Minimum Proficiency Levels (MPLs), which describe the foundational reading and mathematics skills children should demonstrate by the end of lower primary education. These benchmarks were developed through an international process led by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and are aligned with the Global Proficiency Framework, providing a common standard for monitoring progress towards SDG Indicator 4.1.1(a).

In reading, children who meet the MPL for the end of lower primary can recognise common words, read short Grade 2-level texts with understanding, and find information that is stated clearly in those texts. In mathematics, children who reach the MPL can: identify and count whole numbers and compare their size; represent whole numbers in different ways; carry out operations with whole numbers; solve real-life problems involving whole numbers; use non-standard and standard units to measure, compare and order; tell the time and solve problems involving time; recognise and describe shapes and figures; describe the position and direction of objects in space; read and interpret data presented in displays; and recognise, describe, extend and create patterns. These skills are the minimum children need to keep learning successfully in later classes.

The assessment for numeracy comprised 36 items across five mathematical cognitive areas of Number and Operations (23 items), Measurement (6), Shape (3), Data Display (2) and Patterns (2). The assessment for reading comprised 30 items across three areas: Oral Language Comprehension (4 items), Decoding (10) and Reading Comprehension (16).

Results are presented for both **P4 pupils** (**Grade 4** in the international reporting) and all **10-year-old children**. Reporting for P4 reflects the expectation that children should have gained these foundational skills by the end of lower primary, while reporting for age 10 provides a benchmark that does not depend on the class a child is in, and so includes children who are over-age, under-age or out of school. Using both groups gives a more complete picture of

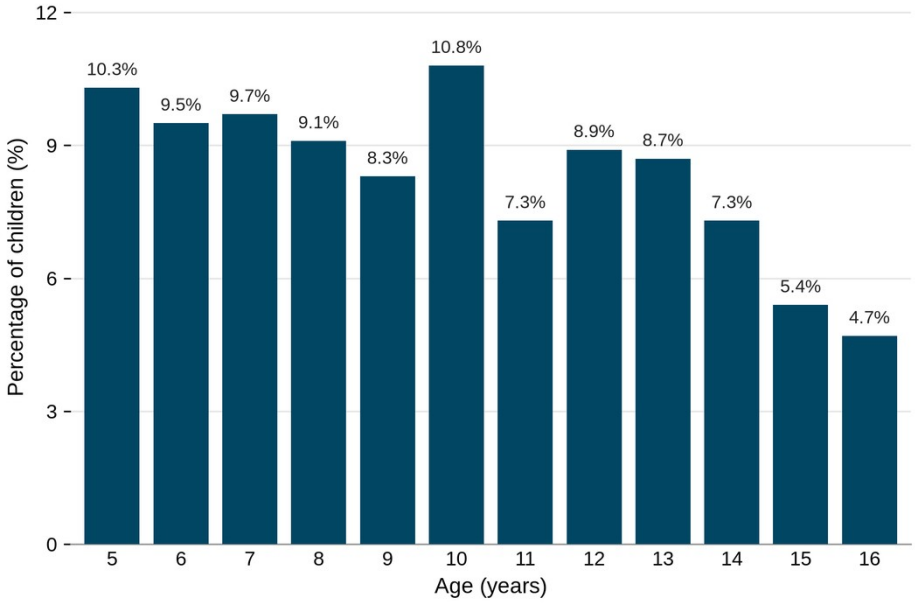
learning and ensures that children who are missed by school-based reporting remain visible in national learning statistics.

5. Who Are the Children? Background and Household Context

5.1 Demographics

The weighted sample was evenly divided into males and females, with 50.5% of the sample being female and 49.5% of the sample being male. Children's ages were fairly similarly distributed across the sample, though notably fewer respondents were adolescents (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Age Distribution of Sampled Children (Ages 5–16)



Using the Washington Group Child Functioning Module (PAL Network, 2025), about 1.3% of the weighted sample were identified as having a disability (using the standard cut-off). This low rate is expected, since children with severe disabilities could not take part in the assessment given the nature of the assessment materials, and the sample was not designed to find enough children with milder disabilities. We therefore cannot draw conclusions about children with disabilities from this study.

5.2 Socioeconomic Status

A household socioeconomic status (SES) index was developed to capture differences in household living conditions and assets within the assessment sample (see Annex 2 for details). The index was constructed based on 20 household characteristics covering housing quality, access to basic services, and household assets, including roofing and wall materials, lighting and water sources, electricity and sanitation, and ownership of assets such as televisions, radios, mobile phones, smartphones, bicycles, motorcycles, vehicles, and computers. Higher SES scores represent relatively wealthier households, while lower scores represent relatively poorer households.

For analysis, households were divided into five SES groups (quintiles), from the poorest 20% (Quintile 1) to the wealthiest 20% (Quintile 5). Table 3 shows the weighted share of children in each group. Children are spread fairly evenly across the five groups, which provides a useful basis for comparing learning outcomes by household wealth.

Table 3: Distribution of Children across Socioeconomic Quintiles

SES quintile	Description	Weighted % of children	95% confidence interval
1	Poorest	18.5%	15.3–21.7%
2	Lower-middle	17.9%	15.2–20.7%
3	Middle	23.3%	19.3–27.4%
4	Upper-middle	20.8%	18.8–22.9%
5	Wealthiest	19.4%	16.5–22.2%

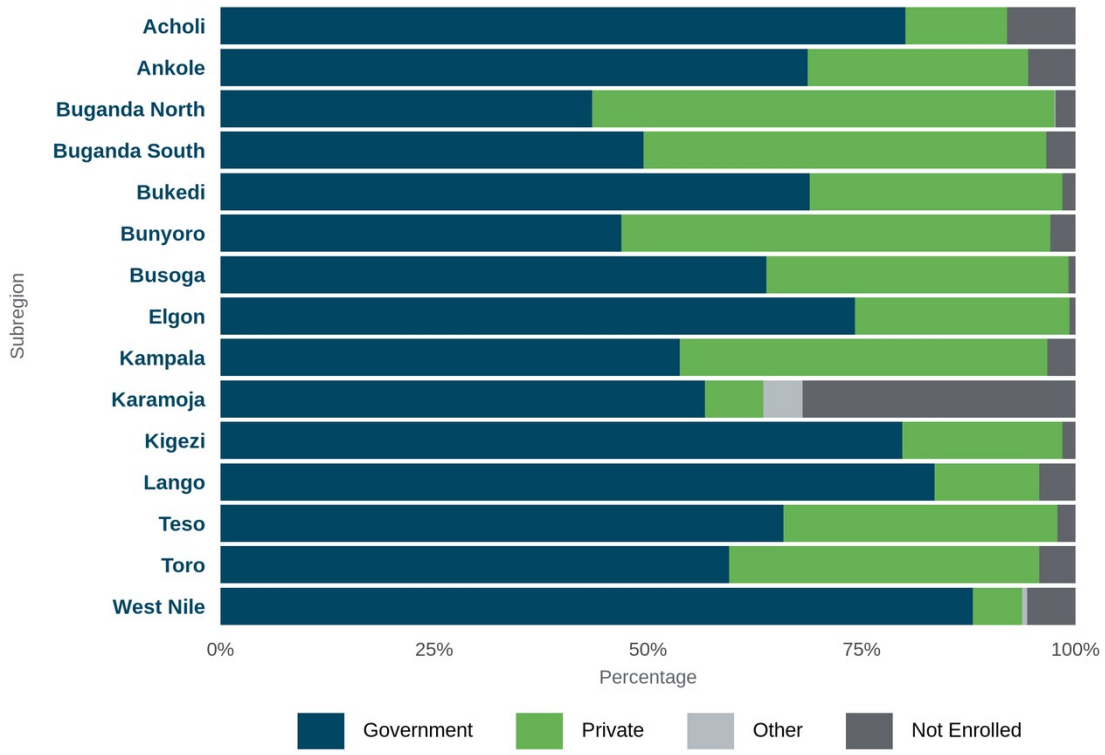
Note: Percentages are weighted to represent all children aged 5 to 16. The 95% confidence interval shows the range within which the true percentage is likely to lie.

5.3 Education

Enrolment

When weighted to the full population, the majority of children (93.9%) were enrolled in school. Of those who were enrolled in school, the majority (55.2%) were enrolled in government schools, with 44.4% enrolled in private schools. Figure 3 shows the distribution of school type by subregion.

Figure 3: Distribution of School Type, by Subregion



Parental Education and Learning Supports

The majority of children had parents who attended some school: 78.2% had a mother who attended school, and 88.2% had a father who attended school. However, only 32.1% had reading materials at home, and only 19% had children's books in the home.

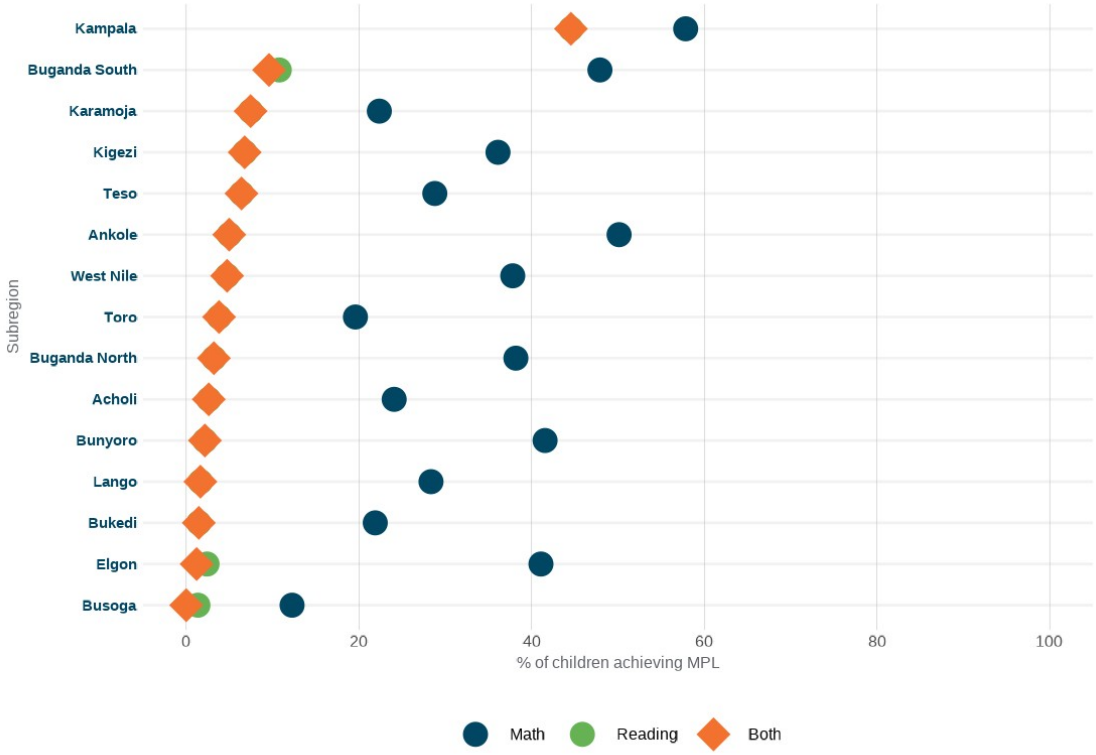
6. Overall Learning Outcomes in Uganda

Overall, children's reading outcomes in Uganda lag behind their mathematics outcomes, a pattern also seen in ICAN–ICAR data from most other participating countries (PAL Network, 2025). Comparing all 10-year-olds, whether or not they are in school, with children enrolled in P4 shows that children in school achieve more. The rest of this section explains these findings.

Among 10-year-old children (see Figure 4), the share reaching the MPL in mathematics was higher than in reading in every subregion. Kampala recorded the highest levels of proficiency, with 57.8% of children reaching the MPL in mathematics and 44.6% reaching the reading MPL. Kampala was also the only subregion where nearly half of 10-year-olds reached proficiency in both mathematics and reading (44.6%). Outside Kampala, mathematics proficiency varied considerably, from 12.3% in Busoga to 50.1% in Ankole. Kampala's age-10 results (57.8% in mathematics and 44.6% in reading) are higher than its P4 results (55.8% and 33.9%), and Kampala is the only subregion where this happens in both subjects. This most likely reflects the very small Kampala sample (82 children of all ages, and far fewer aged 10 or in P4), so the Kampala figures should be read with caution.

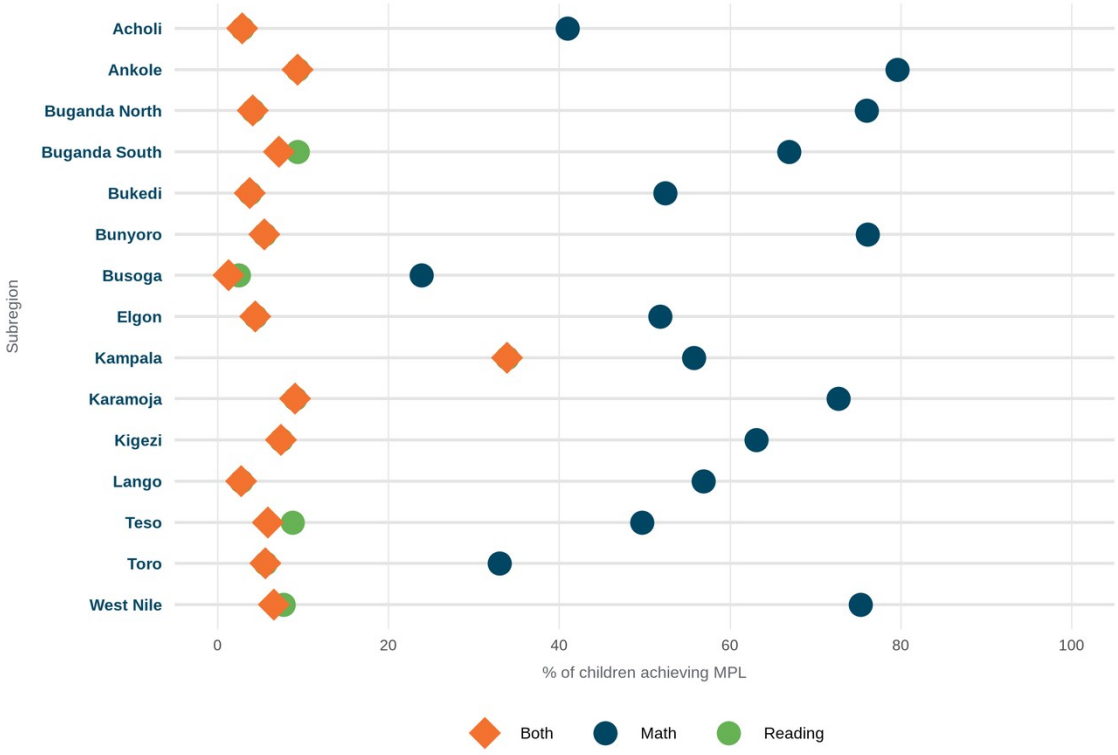
In contrast, reading proficiency remained very low across most of the country. In ten of the fifteen subregions, 5% or fewer 10-year-olds achieved the reading MPL, and in Busoga no children reached proficiency in both subjects. These findings suggest that while a substantial proportion of children have acquired foundational numeracy skills by age 10 in some parts of Uganda, far fewer have developed the reading skills required to meet the internationally defined benchmark. As a result, the proportion of children achieving proficiency in both mathematics and reading remains extremely low outside of Kampala.

Figure 4: Percentage of 10-Year-Olds Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Subregion



A different picture emerges when learning outcomes are examined among children enrolled in P4 (Figure 5). Mathematics proficiency is substantially higher than among all 10-year-olds, with eleven of the fifteen subregions recording more than 50% of pupils at the mathematics MPL. Ankole (79.6%), Bunyoro (76.1%), Buganda North (76.0%), West Nile (75.3%), and Karamoja (72.7%) recorded the highest levels of mathematics proficiency, while Busoga (23.9%) and Toro (33.0%) had the lowest. Reading proficiency was also somewhat higher among P4 pupils than among 10-year-olds, but remained considerably lower than mathematics proficiency. Kampala again recorded the highest proportion of children reaching the reading MPL (33.9%), while all other subregions remained below 10%. Consequently, the percentage of children achieving proficiency in both subjects closely mirrored reading performance, underscoring that reading remains the principal constraint to children attaining foundational learning in both subjects.

Figure 5: Percentage of P4 Pupils Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Subregion



Comparing children enrolled in P4 with all 10-year-olds highlights an important pattern. In nearly all subregions, P4 pupils show much higher mathematics proficiency than children aged 10. This partly reflects the benefits of staying in school and progressing through it. However, the comparison is not like for like. Many P4 pupils in Uganda are older than 10: more than half of the children enrolled in P4 in Uganda are 12 years old or older (PAL Network, 2025). Part of the P4 advantage therefore reflects age as well as schooling. The gap is largest in Karamoja (22.4% at age 10 compared with 72.7% in P4 in mathematics), which is consistent with lower school enrolment there, since out-of-school children are included in the age-10 results but not in the P4 results. The P4 advantage in reading is much smaller. Even among P4 pupils, relatively few have reached the global benchmark for foundational reading. This pattern is consistent with the PAL Network global and East and Southern Africa reports, which show that foundational reading continues to lag behind mathematics in many participating countries (PAL Network, 2025; PAL Network, 2026a). For Uganda, these results point to the need for stronger efforts to improve early-grade literacy while sustaining gains in foundational numeracy, particularly outside Kampala, where proficiency in both subjects remains very low.

7. Learning Outcomes by Gender, Location, Wealth, Enrolment, Home Language and Family Support

A child's chances of achieving foundational literacy and numeracy are shaped by a range of individual, household and community characteristics. This section examines learning outcomes across six such factors: gender (7.1), urban or rural location (7.2), household socioeconomic status (7.3), school enrolment (7.4), home language (7.5) and family support (7.6). Some of these factors show only small links with achievement that depend on the local context. Gender differences, for instance, vary in direction across subregions and are small

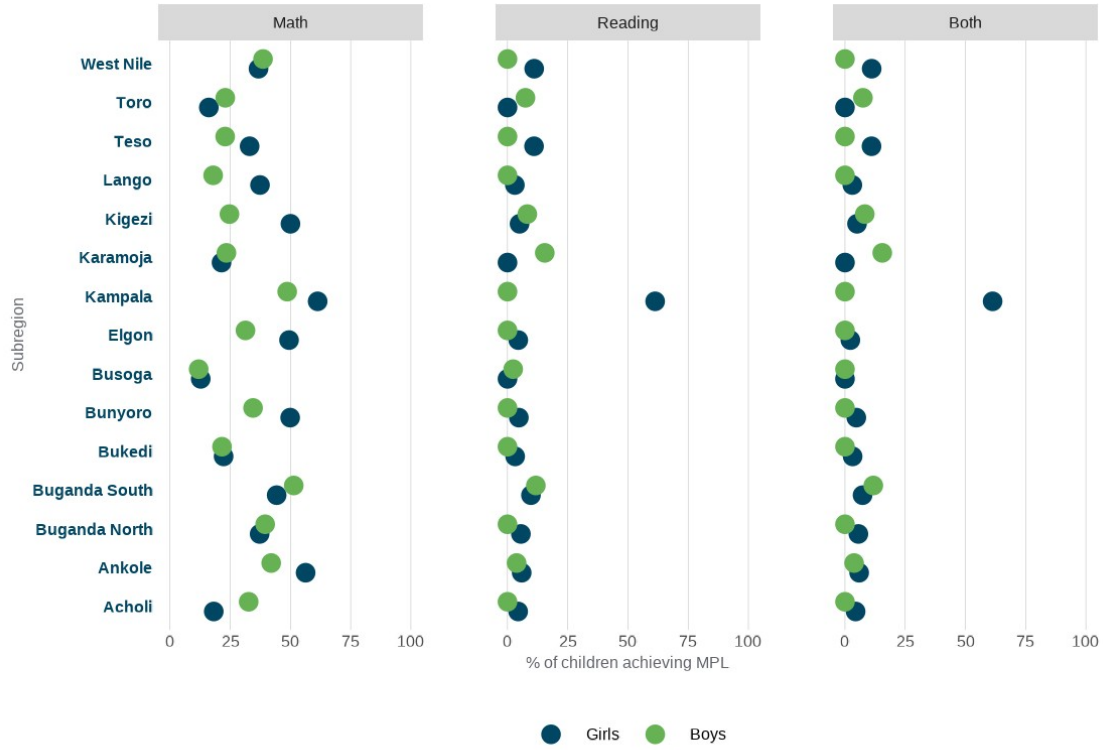
compared with other gaps. Others show large and consistent links: children in wealthier households, those living in urban areas, those enrolled in school and those who speak the assessment language at home all show much higher rates of proficiency, particularly in reading. Taken together, these findings suggest that location, household wealth, school enrolment and language are more strongly linked to learning outcomes in Uganda than gender, and that improving foundational learning will require attention to the conditions in communities and homes that support or limit children's opportunities to learn.

7.1 Gender Differences

Overall, Uganda does not exhibit a consistent national pattern of one gender outperforming the other across all subregions. Instead, gender differences vary considerably by location and subject, while the much larger gap between mathematics and reading observed in the previous section remains evident for both girls and boys.

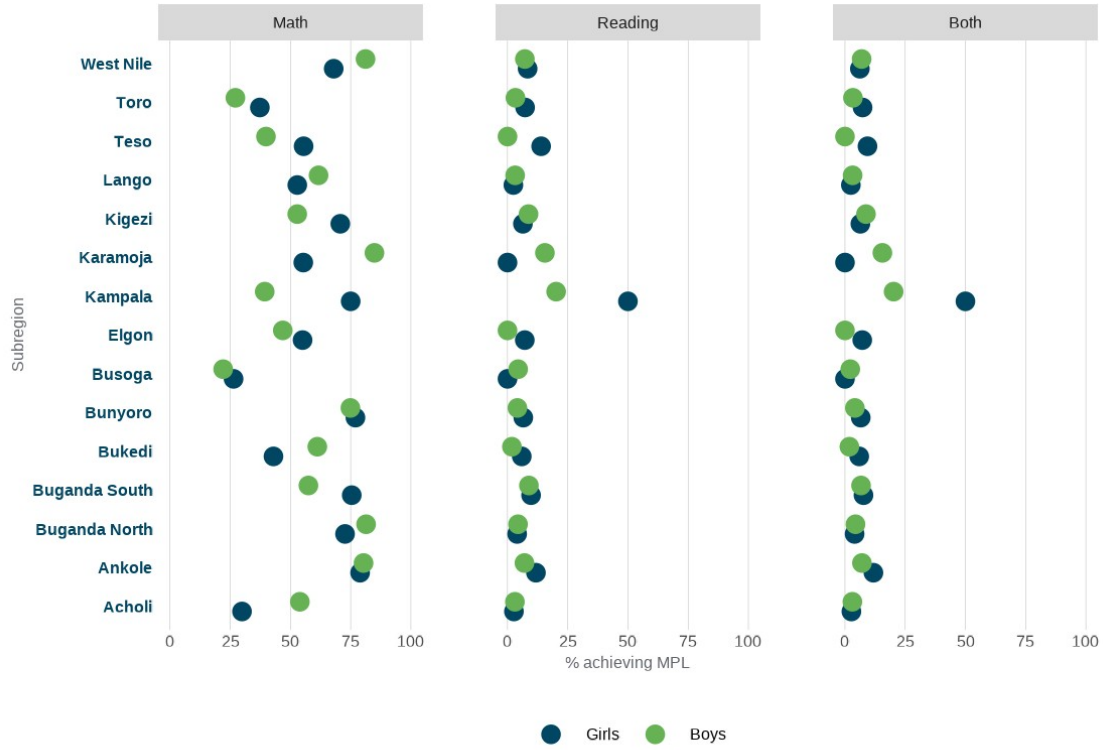
Among **10-year-old children** (Figure 6), mathematics proficiency differs between girls and boys across subregions, but not always in the same direction. Girls do better than boys in mathematics in several subregions, including Ankole, Bunyoro, Elgon, Kampala, Kigezi, Lango and Teso, while boys do better in Acholi, Buganda South, Karamoja, Toro and West Nile. Reading proficiency remains low for both girls and boys in most of the country, although girls record higher reading results than boys in many subregions. In contrast, boys do better than girls in reading in Buganda South, Busoga, Karamoja, Kigezi and Toro. The Kampala results by gender need particular care. In Kampala, 61.3% of girls aged 10 reached the mathematics benchmark compared with 48.6% of boys, and 61.3% of girls reached the reading benchmark compared with none of the boys assessed (Table A3). This does not mean that no boys in Kampala can read at this level. These figures rest on very few children: Kampala's overall age-10 reading figure (44.6%) implies that about three in four of the weighted Kampala 10-year-olds were girls, so the gender figures for Kampala are not reliable and should not be used to draw conclusions. Overall, these results suggest that gender differences depend on the local context rather than following a national pattern, and that differences between subregions are larger than differences between girls and boys.

Figure 6: Percentage of 10-Year-Olds Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Gender



A similar pattern is observed among **children enrolled in P4** (Figure 7). Mathematics proficiency increases substantially for both girls and boys relative to age 10, but the direction of gender differences continues to vary across subregions. Boys record higher mathematics proficiency in Acholi, Buganda North, Bukedi, Karamoja, Lango, and West Nile, whereas girls outperform boys in Buganda South, Bunyoro, Busoga, Elgon, Kampala, Kigezi, Tesoand Toro. Reading proficiency remains comparatively low for both sexes, although girls achieve higher reading proficiency in several subregions, including Ankole, Elgon, Teso and Toro (and Kampala, although its sample is very small), while boys perform better in Busoga, Karamoja and Kigezi. As in the age-10 results, the proportion of children reaching proficiency in both subjects closely mirrors reading performance, reinforcing the finding that foundational literacy remains the principal challenge for both girls and boys.

Figure 7: Percentage of P4 Pupils Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Gender



Taken together, the results indicate that gender differences in Uganda are relatively modest compared with the much larger disparities observed across subregions and between mathematics and reading. Strengthening foundational literacy is likely to benefit both girls and boys, while targeted interventions may be appropriate in subregions where one gender consistently lags behind the other.

7.2 Urban–Rural Differences

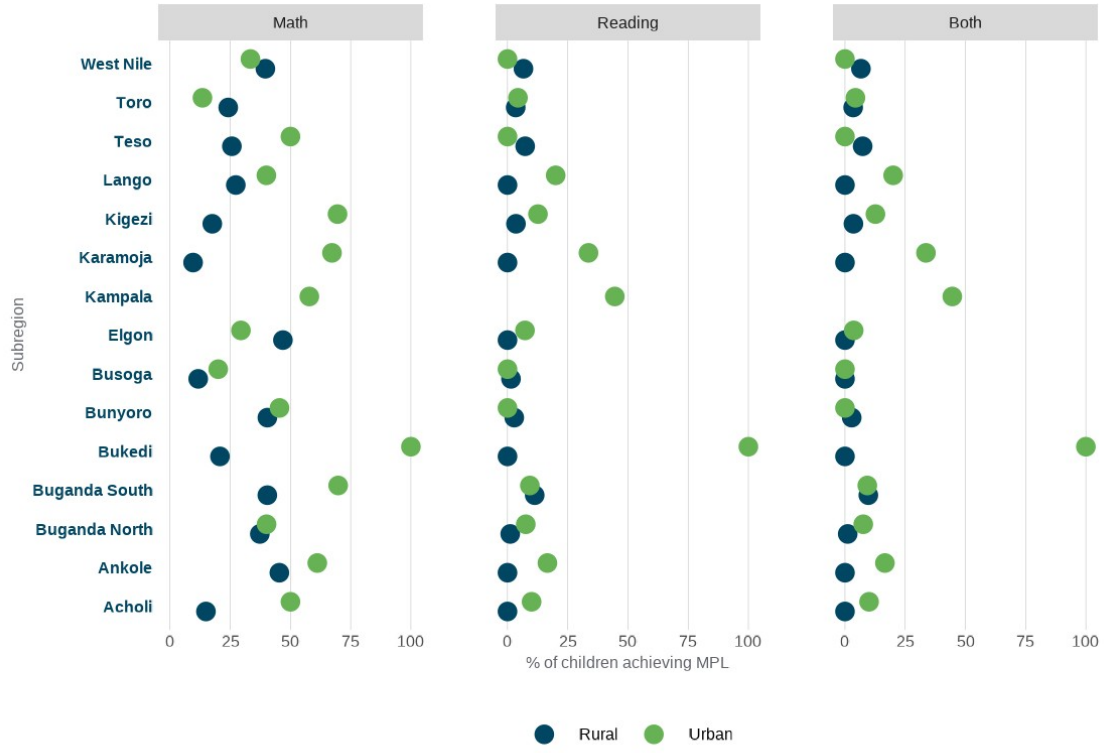
Consistent with findings from the international PAL Network report (PAL Network, 2025), children living in urban areas generally demonstrate higher levels of foundational learning than their rural peers, although the magnitude of these differences varies across subregions and is less pronounced for P4 pupils than for all 10-year-old children.

Among **10-year-old children** (Figure 8), the urban advantage is especially large for reading. Urban 10-year-olds had about four times the odds of rural 10-year-olds of reaching the reading benchmark, and about four times the odds of reaching the benchmark in both subjects[1]. Because few children reach these benchmarks, this means that urban children were more than three times as likely as rural children to do so. Urban advantages are particularly clear in Acholi, Ankole, Karamoja, Kigezi and Lango, where children living in urban areas are much more likely to reach the benchmark in both subjects. Kampala, which is entirely urban, records the highest overall results, with 57.8% of children reaching the mathematics benchmark and 44.6% reaching the benchmark in both subjects, although its sample is small. Elgon, Toro and West Nile show similar or better mathematics results in rural areas, but these exceptions do

1 Survey-weighted logistic regression comparing urban and rural 10-year-olds: odds ratio 4.08 for reading and 4.37 for both subjects (both $p < 0.001$). An odds ratio compares the odds of two groups and is not the same as 'times as likely', which is why the text also gives a plain comparison.

not change the broader pattern of higher learning outcomes in urban areas. As in earlier sections, reading proficiency remains low in both rural and urban areas outside Kampala, which limits the share of children who reach the benchmark in both subjects.

Figure 8: Percentage of 10-Year-Olds Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Location (Urban or Rural)



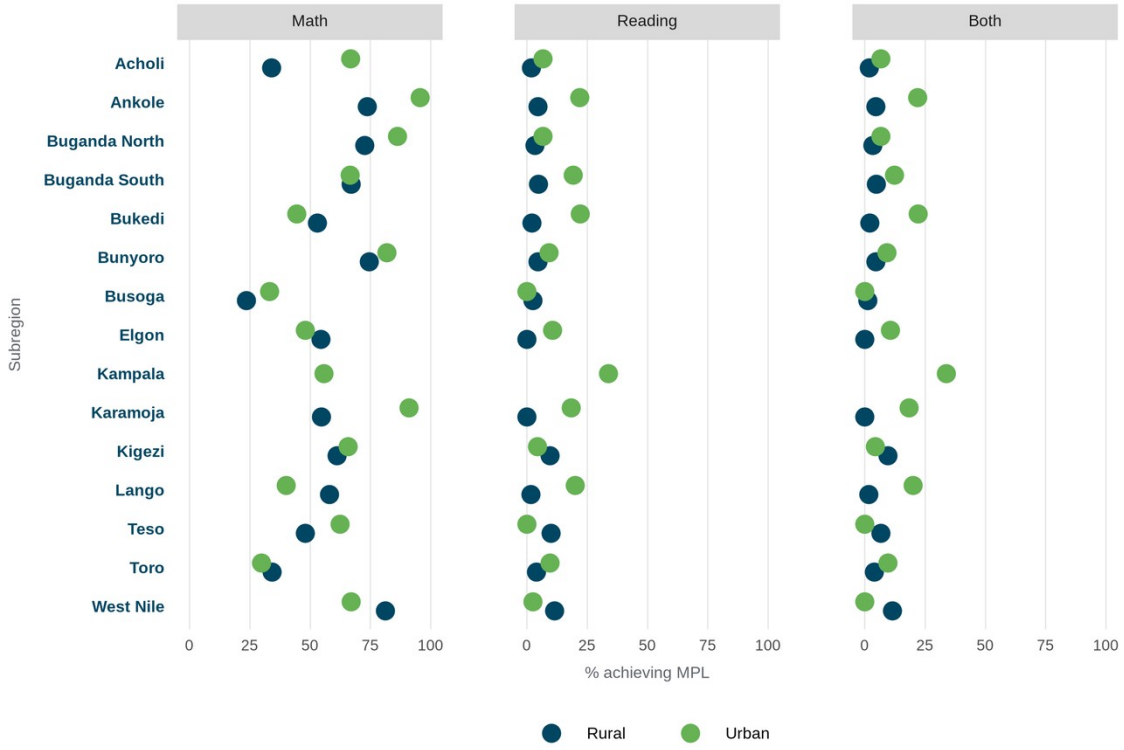
Among **P4 pupils** (Figure 9), mathematics proficiency is much higher in both urban and rural areas. There was no clear overall urban–rural gap in mathematics among P4 pupils, but urban pupils did better in reading and in both subjects together. Urban P4 pupils had significantly higher odds[2] of reaching the reading benchmark (about 2.8 times the odds of rural pupils) and the benchmark in both subjects (also about 2.8 times). In simple percentages, 9.8% of urban P4 pupils reached the benchmark in both subjects, compared with 3.8% of rural P4 pupils (PAL Network, 2026a).

Figure 9 displays these differences by subregion, demonstrating that urban-rural differences are not uniform across subregions[3]. Advantages in the urban areas in reading are evident in several subregions, particularly Ankole, Buganda South, Bukedi and Elgon, although West Nile and Kigezi show stronger reading performance among children in rural areas. Across both mathematics and reading, the urban–rural differences are generally smaller than those observed among all 10-year-old children, suggesting that continued school participation may narrow some of the geographic disparities in learning.

2 Survey-weighted logistic regression comparing urban and rural P4 pupils: odds ratio 2.81 for reading ($p < 0.001$) and 2.75 for both subjects ($p = 0.001$). The urban–rural difference in mathematics was not statistically significant ($p = 0.091$).

3 The link between location and proficiency differs significantly across subregions for mathematics ($p < 0.05$), reading ($p < 0.001$) and both subjects ($p < 0.001$).

Figure 9: Percentage of P4 Pupils Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Location (Urban or Rural)



7.3 Socioeconomic Status and Learning Outcomes

Household socioeconomic status is strongly linked to children's learning outcomes. As shown in Figure 10, the share of children reaching minimum proficiency generally rises with household wealth. Children in wealthier households are more likely to reach the mathematics MPL, the reading MPL, and proficiency in both subjects. For example, 21.6% of children from the wealthiest households reached the benchmark in both subjects, compared with only 1.6% of children from the poorest households. In mathematics the figures were 71.1% and 38.3%, and in reading 22.3% and 1.7%.

Figure 10: Percentage of Children Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Household Socioeconomic Status

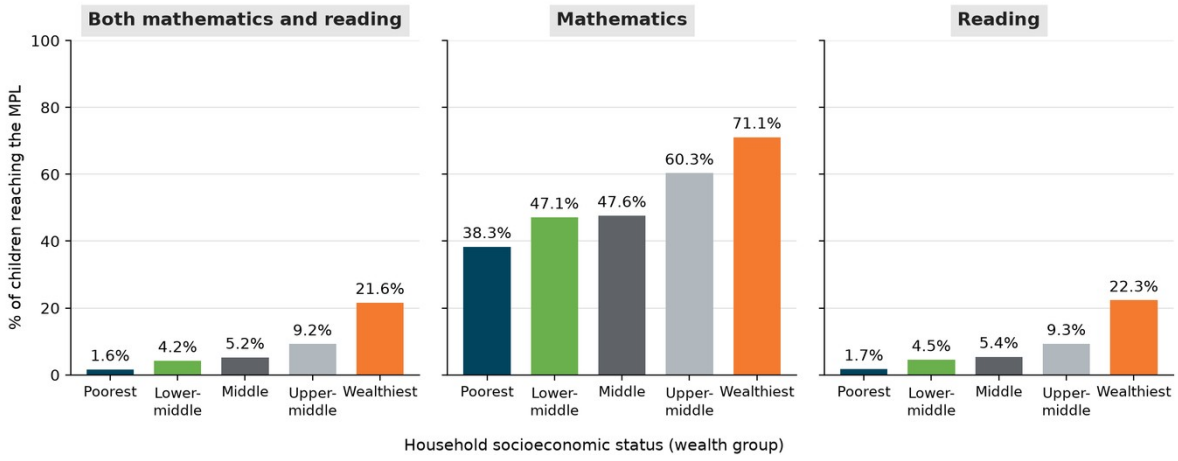


Table 4: Chances of Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Household Wealth Group (Odds Ratios Compared with the Poorest Group)

Household wealth group	Mathematics: odds ratio (95% CI)	Reading: odds ratio (95% CI)	Both subjects: odds ratio (95% CI)
Q1: Poorest	1.00 (reference group)	1.00 (reference group)	1.00 (reference group)
Q2: Lower middle	1.43 (1.06–1.95)	2.68 (1.41–5.11)	2.75 (1.42–5.34)
Q3: Middle	1.47 (1.12–1.91)	3.27 (1.70–6.29)	3.43 (1.72–6.85)
Q4: Upper middle	2.45 (1.77–3.38)	5.88 (3.02–11.43)	6.34 (3.12–12.87)
Q5: Wealthiest	3.96 (2.78–5.65)	16.36 (8.75–30.56)	17.17 (8.84–33.36)

How to read this table: a value of 1.00 means the same chances as the poorest group. For example, a value of 3.96 for mathematics in the wealthiest group means that these children had about four times the odds of the poorest children of reaching the mathematics benchmark. The numbers in brackets (95% confidence intervals) show the range within which the true value is likely to lie; wider ranges mean more uncertainty. Each group is compared directly with the poorest group, without adjusting for other factors such as age, class or location.

Table 4 shows the same comparison as odds ratios, using the poorest group as the reference point. It is based on the same children as Figure 10 and compares each wealth group with the poorest group directly, without adjusting for other factors such as age, class or location. The chances of reaching minimum proficiency rise with each step up in household wealth, and the rise is steepest for reading. Children from the wealthiest households had about four times the odds of the poorest children of reaching the mathematics benchmark, and about 16 to 17 times the odds of reaching the reading benchmark or the benchmark in both subjects. For the wealthiest group the range of likely values is wide (for example, from about 9 to 33 times the odds for both subjects), so the exact size of the gap is uncertain, but it is clearly large. The pattern suggests that children from wealthier households have much greater chances of reaching minimum proficiency, especially in reading. This large gap in reading suggests that efforts to improve learning should consider not only the quality of teaching in schools, but also the conditions and learning opportunities that shape children's lives beyond the classroom.

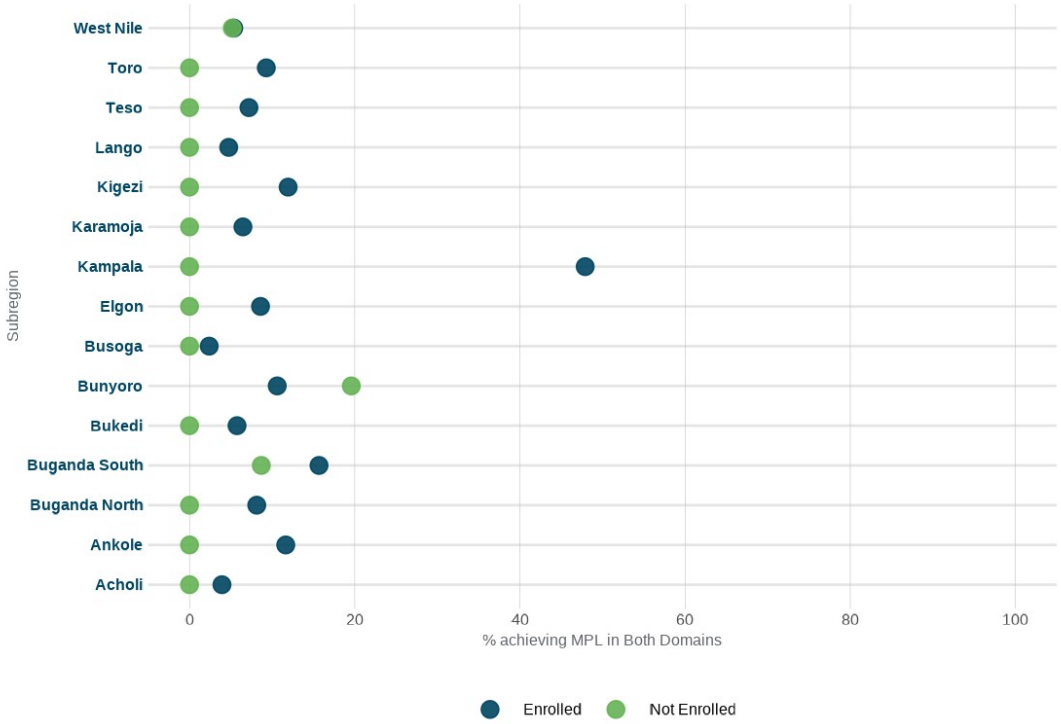
7.4 Differences by School Enrolment

Among children aged 10 to 14, those enrolled in school were generally more likely to reach minimum proficiency in mathematics and reading than those who were not enrolled. The difference was statistically significant. Children who were not enrolled had about one-fifth of the odds of enrolled children of reaching the mathematics benchmark, the reading benchmark, or the benchmark in both subjects (odds about 80% lower)[4].

The gap is also visible across subregions in Figure 11. Kampala shows by far the highest achievement among enrolled children, with about 48% reaching the benchmark in both subjects. Among enrolled children, achievement was also relatively high in Ankole (about 11%), Buganda South (about 16%), Bunyoro (about 11%) and Kigezi (about 12%), while levels were lower in most other subregions. Achievement among children who were not enrolled was very low in most subregions. However, only a small number of out-of-school children aged 10 to 14 were assessed in each subregion, so the subregional figures for these children are not reliable and are not compared here.

4 Survey-weighted logistic regression comparing children aged 10 to 14 who were not enrolled with those who were enrolled: odds ratio 0.19 for mathematics ($p < 0.001$), 0.21 for reading ($p = 0.010$) and 0.21 for both subjects ($p = 0.011$).

Figure 11: Percentage of Children Aged 10–14 Reaching Minimum Proficiency in Both Subjects, by Enrolment Status



Overall, the findings show a strong and statistically significant link between **school enrolment and learning among children aged 10 to 14**.

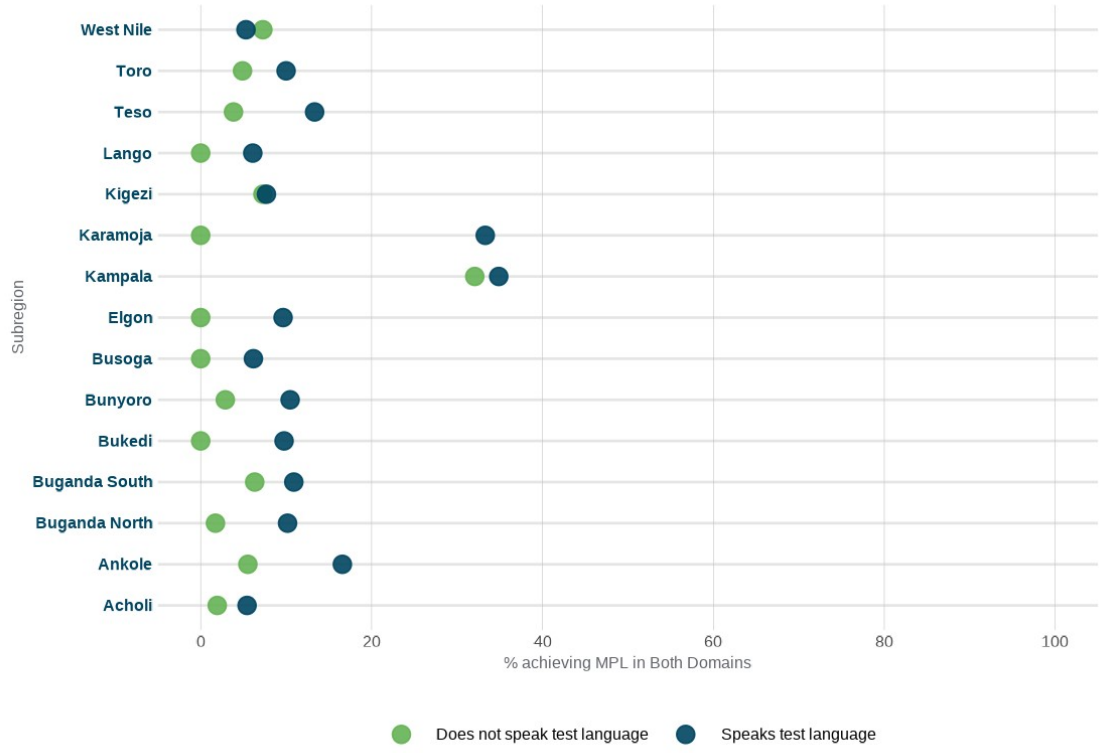
7.5 Differences by Language Spoken at Home

In Uganda, the assessment was conducted in English, so speaking the language of assessment at home means speaking English at home. About 29% of Ugandan children speak English at home (PAL Network, 2026a). Speaking English at home is likely to be closely linked to living in an urban area and to household wealth, so this result partly reflects those factors as well, and the figures below do not adjust for them. **Among P4 pupils, those who spoke English at home were significantly more likely to reach the benchmarks.** They had about 1.7 times the odds of reaching the mathematics benchmark and about 2.9 times the odds of reaching the reading benchmark compared with pupils who did not speak English at home[5]. For both subjects together, 10.3% of P4 pupils who spoke English at home reached the benchmark, compared with 3.1% of those who did not (about 3.5 times the odds) (PAL Network, 2026a).

The link between speaking English at home and mathematics results was similar across subregions. In contrast, the link with reading, and with reaching the benchmark in both subjects, differed significantly from one subregion to another. This may reflect differences across subregions in the languages children speak at home. The relationship between home language and reading therefore depends strongly on the local context, as shown in Figure 12.

5 Survey-weighted logistic regression comparing P4 pupils who speak English at home with those who do not: odds ratio 1.73 for mathematics (95% confidence interval 1.25–2.39; $p = 0.001$), 2.88 for reading (1.82–4.54; $p < 0.001$) and 3.54 for both subjects (2.17–5.78; $p < 0.001$). The link with mathematics did not differ significantly across subregions ($p = 0.702$), while the links with reading and with both subjects did ($p < 0.001$).

Figure 12: Percentage of P4 Pupils Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Whether They Speak the Language of Assessment (English) at Home



7.6 Differences by Family Support

Looking at parents' education and help with homework suggests that children with more educational support at home are generally more likely to reach the benchmark in both mathematics and reading, although the size of these links varies across subregions.

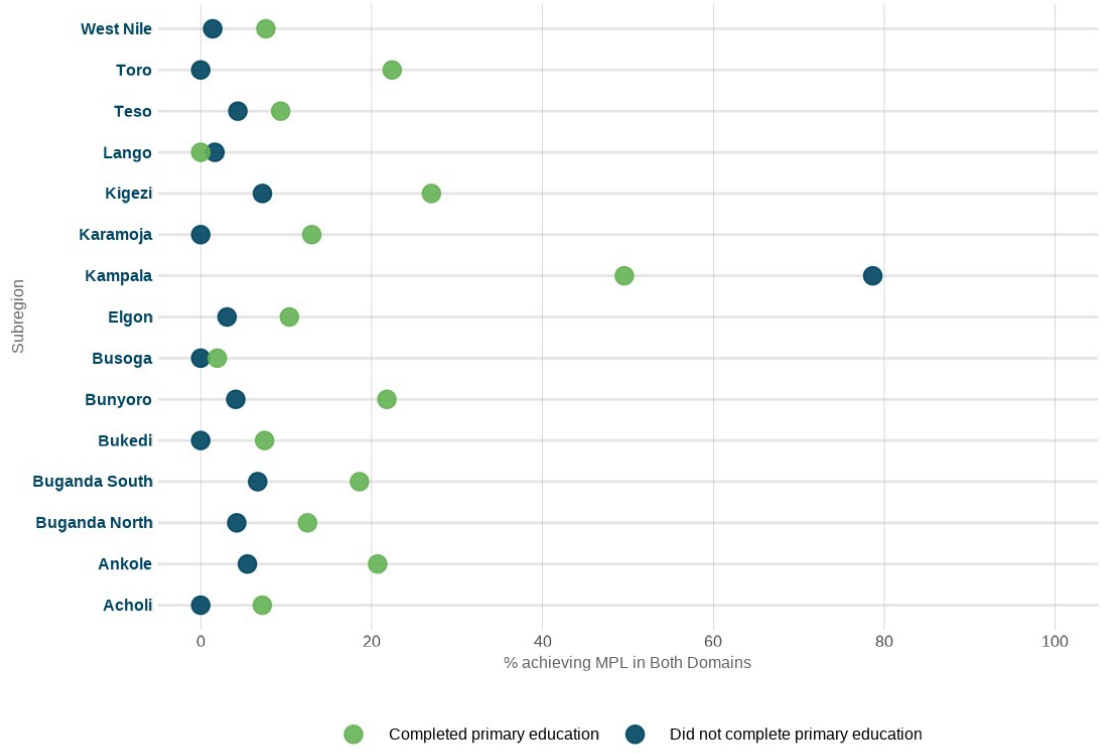
Parental Education

Overall, children with at least one parent who had completed primary school did better than children whose parents had not. Among children aged 10 to 14, 13.2% of those with at least one parent who had completed primary school reached the benchmark in both mathematics and reading, compared with 3.5% of those whose parents had not (PAL Network, 2026a). In other words, these children had about four times the odds[6] of reaching the benchmark in both subjects.

Examining MPL achievement at the subregional level reinforces this finding: with the exception of Kampala (where the sample is very small), parental completion of primary education is consistently associated with higher levels of learning in subregions such as Ankole, Buganda South, Bunyoro, Karamoja, Kigezi and Toro (see Figure 13). In several subregions, including Lango and Busoga, the differences between the two groups are relatively small, while a few subregions show little or no advantage associated with parental education. Overall, however, the results indicate that children whose parents have completed at least primary education are generally more likely to attain minimum proficiency.

6 Survey-weighted logistic regression comparing children aged 10 to 14 with at least one parent who completed primary school with children whose parents had not: odds ratio about 4.1 ($p < 0.001$).

Figure 13: Percentage of Children Aged 10–14 Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Parental Education

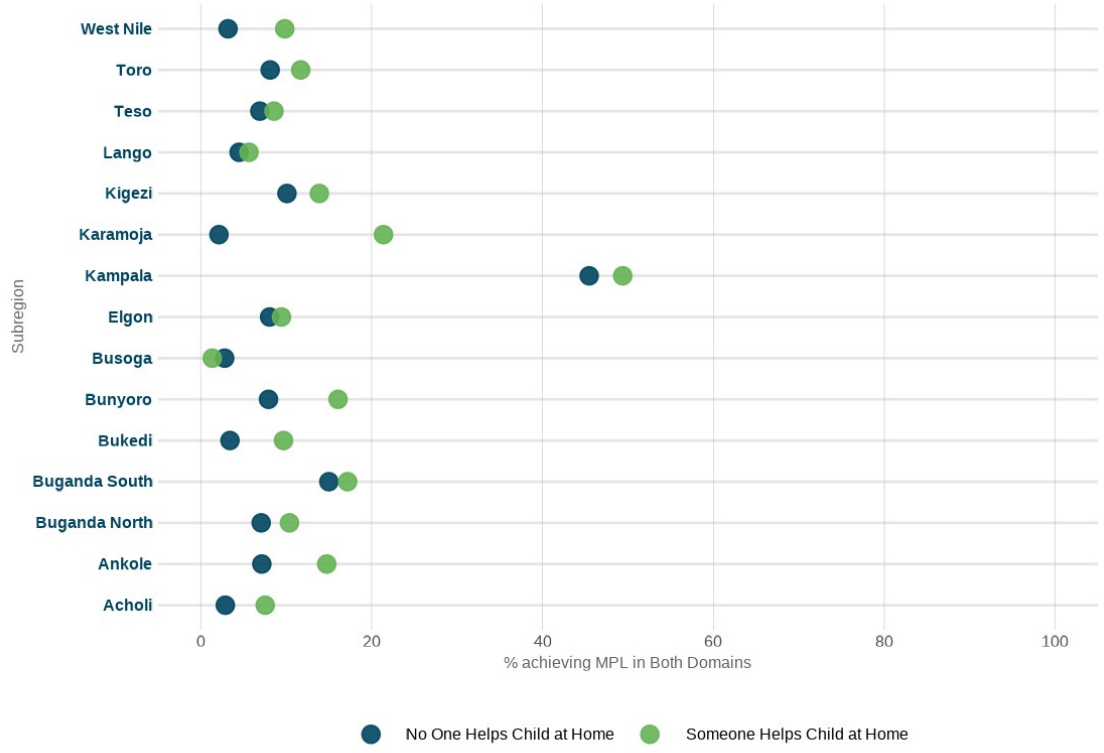


Support for Learning at Home

Overall, children who received help with homework at home had better learning outcomes. Of the children who received homework help, 11.7% reached the benchmark in both subjects, compared with 6.6% of those who did not (PAL Network, 2026a), or about 1.8 times the odds[7]. As Figure 14 shows, this pattern holds in most subregions. The advantage is particularly clear in Ankole, Bunyoro, Kampala and Karamoja, where children who receive help at home are more likely to reach the benchmark in both subjects than children without such support. Smaller but consistent advantages are also seen in Acholi, Buganda North, Bukedi, Toro and West Nile. In a few subregions, including Busoga and Teso, the differences are minimal, suggesting that other factors may play a larger role there.

7 Survey-weighted logistic regression comparing children who received homework support with those who did not: odds ratio about 1.8 ($p < 0.001$).

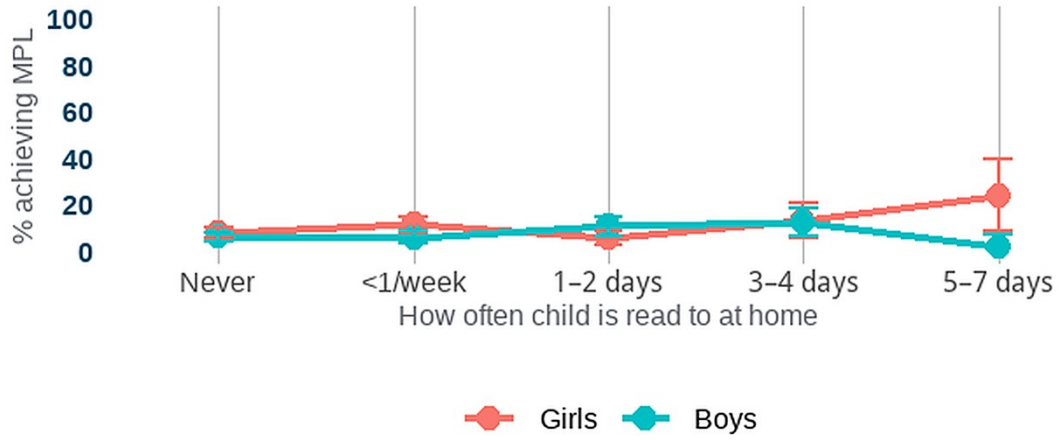
Figure 14: Percentage of Children Aged 10–14 Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Homework Support



Across the country as a whole, how often a child is read to at home is not significantly associated with reaching minimum proficiency. The picture changes, however, when girls and boys are looked at separately: the link between being read to at home and learning was significantly different for girls and boys[8]. There was no clear difference between girls and boys who were never read to at home, but girls who were read to at home, especially those read to on five to seven days a week, appeared to do better than boys who were read to equally often (see Figure 15). Because few children are read to often, these estimates are uncertain, as the wide ranges in Figure 15 show.

8 Survey-weighted logistic regression including an interaction between gender and how often the child is read to at home (Wald $F(4, 198) = 6.52$, $p < 0.001$).

Figure 15: Relationship between Reading at Home and Learning Outcomes, by Gender



8. Learning Trajectories: Progress Across Age and Class

Whereas the previous sections compared learning outcomes at specific ages or classes, this section examines learning trajectories, showing how the share of children reaching the Minimum Proficiency Level (MPL) changes as children grow older (from age 6 up to age 14) and as they move from Primary One (P1) to Senior Two (S2). Figure 16 covers ages 6 to 12 and Figure 17 covers ages 6 to 14. Presenting trajectories by both age and class gives two complementary perspectives. Age-based trajectories include all children, whether or not they are in school, while class-based trajectories reflect the progress of children who remain enrolled and move up through the education system.

8.1 Learning Trajectories by Age

Across Uganda, the proportion of children achieving proficiency in both mathematics and reading generally increases with age, although progress is often gradual and uneven. In many subregions, proficiency remains close to zero throughout the early primary years before increasing modestly among older children. This pattern suggests that many children acquire foundational competencies later than expected, with substantial variation across subregions.

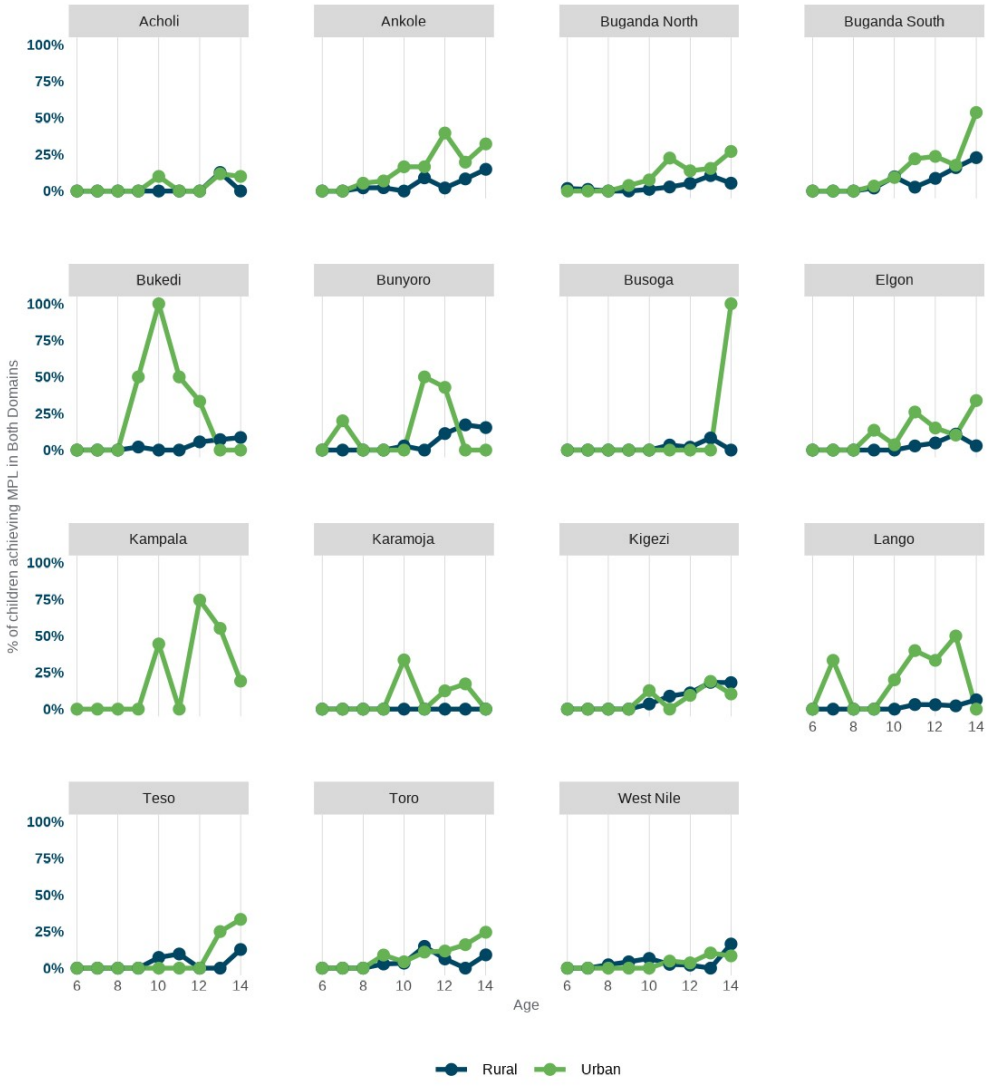
The trajectories by **gender** (Figure 16) show relatively similar patterns for girls and boys. In most subregions, both sexes experience gradual improvements as they grow older, and differences between girls and boys are generally small compared with the differences observed across subregions. Ankole, Buganda South, Kampala, Kigezi and West Nile show the strongest upward trajectories, while proficiency remains comparatively low across all ages in subregions such as Acholi, Busoga, and Karamoja. Although individual subregions occasionally show one gender outperforming the other at particular ages, no consistent national pattern emerges, reinforcing the findings presented in Section 7.

Figure 16: Learning Trajectories by Age (Ages 6–12), by Gender



When learning trajectories are examined by **location** (Figure 17), clearer differences emerge. Urban children generally achieve proficiency earlier and experience steeper improvements with age than their rural peers. This pattern is evident in several subregions, including Ankole, Buganda South, Elgon, Karamoja and Kigezi, where urban trajectories consistently remain above rural trajectories throughout much of the age range. Nevertheless, the urban advantage is not universal. Some subregions, such as Toro and West Nile, show similar or occasionally stronger performance among rural children at older ages. Overall, however, the age trajectories suggest that children living in urban areas are more likely to achieve the MPL as they grow older.

Figure 17: Learning Trajectories by Age (Ages 6–14), by Location (Urban or Rural)



Taken together, the age-based trajectories indicate that simply growing older does not guarantee that children acquire foundational competencies. In many subregions, learning gains remain modest through late childhood, highlighting the importance of ensuring that additional years of age are accompanied by effective learning opportunities.

8.2 Learning Trajectories by Class

Compared with the age-based trajectories, there is a much clearer pattern of increasing proficiency as children advance through school. In most subregions, learning accelerates after the early primary classes, although the pace of improvement differs substantially across the country.

The trajectories by **gender** (Figure 18) demonstrate that both girls and boys generally experience higher levels of proficiency as they progress through successive classes. In many subregions, including Ankole, Buganda North, Buganda South, Bunyoro, Kampala and Kigezi, the proportion of children achieving the MPL rises sharply in the upper primary classes. Gender differences continue to vary across subregions, with girls outperforming boys in some

contexts and boys outperforming girls in others, but these differences remain relatively modest compared with the overall increases associated with progression through school. The figures therefore suggest that progression through school benefits both girls and boys, even though learning gains are not uniform across Uganda.

Figure 18: Learning Trajectories by Class (P1 to S2), by Gender

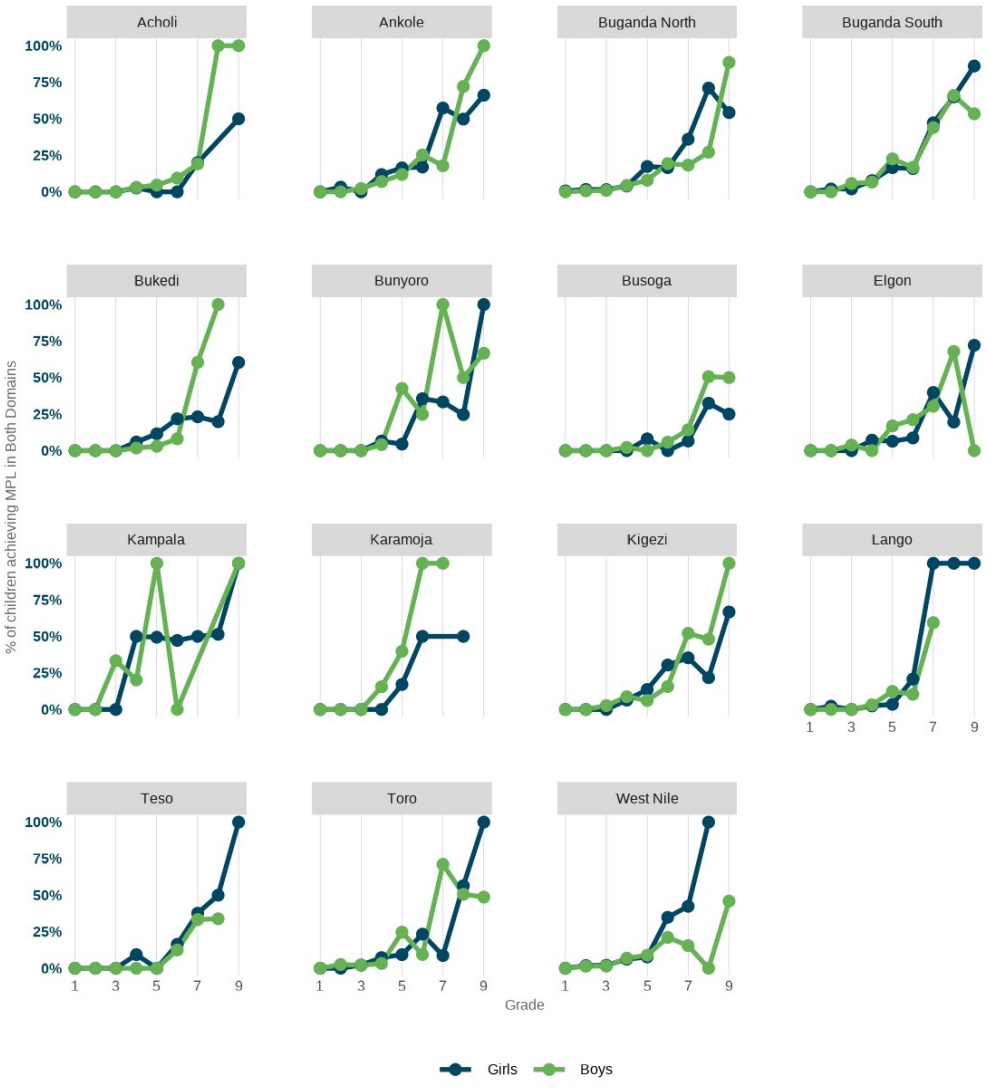
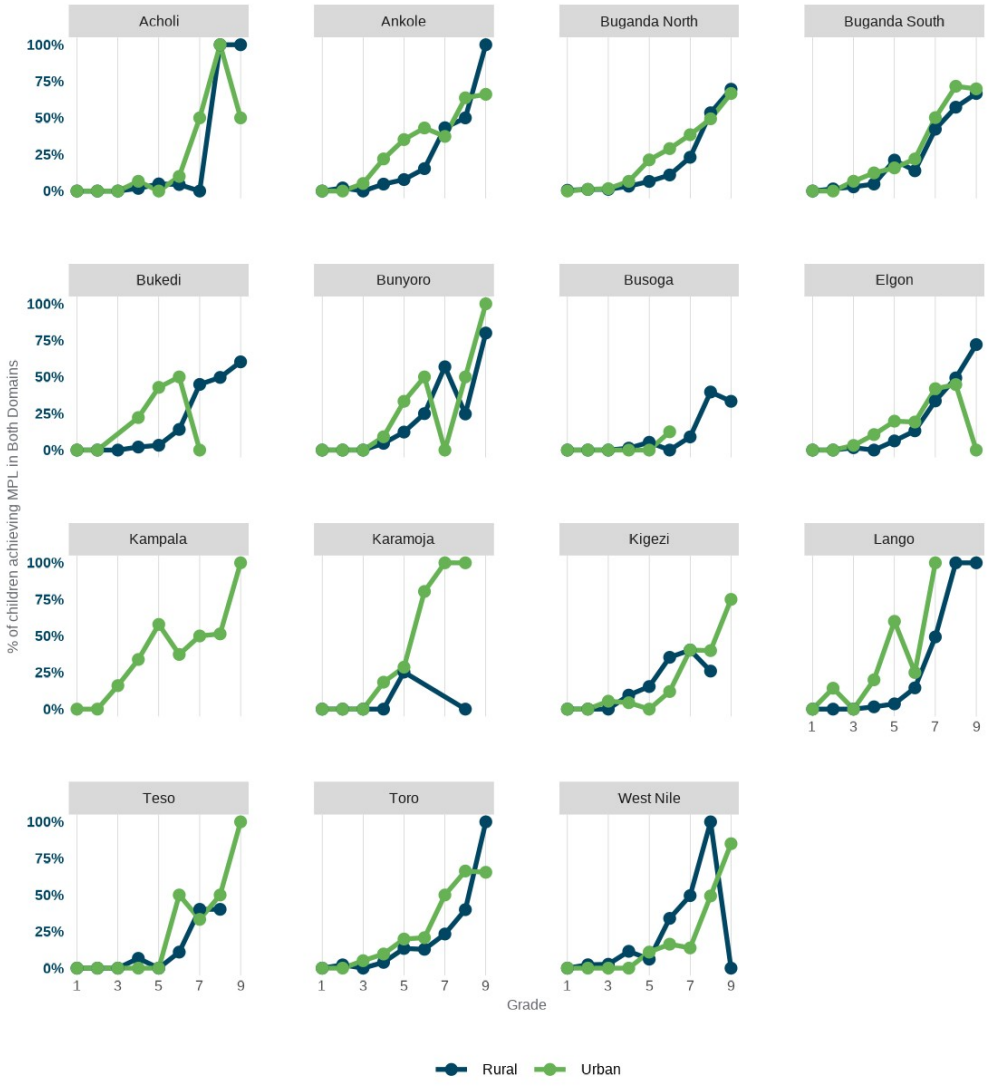


Figure 19 compares learning trajectories by **location** among children enrolled in school. As with the age trajectories, urban pupils generally exhibit steeper learning trajectories than rural pupils, particularly in Ankole, Buganda South, Karamoja, Kampala, and Lango. However, the differences between urban and rural pupils are generally smaller than those observed in the age-based trajectories. In several subregions, including Buganda North, Teso and Toro, rural and urban pupils demonstrate broadly similar patterns of improvement across classes. These findings suggest that continued participation in school narrows some of the disparities associated with place of residence, although important geographic inequalities remain.

Figure 19: Learning Trajectories by Class (P1 to S2), by Location (Urban or Rural)



8.3 Overall Patterns

Comparing the age and class trajectories highlights an important feature of learning in Uganda. While proficiency generally increases with both age and class, improvements are considerably more pronounced across classes than across ages. Children who continue progressing through school are substantially more likely to reach the Minimum Proficiency Level than children of the same age considered irrespective of class. This difference reflects the fact that age-based results include children who have experienced delayed school entry, repeating a class, irregular attendance, or school dropout, all of which reduce opportunities to acquire foundational skills.

The trajectories also reinforce earlier findings that geography plays a larger role in shaping learning outcomes than gender. Differences between urban and rural areas remain visible across both age and class, while gender differences are comparatively small and inconsistent across subregions. Together, these findings underscore the importance of ensuring that children not only enrol in school but also progress successfully through the primary classes

while receiving instruction of sufficient quality to build foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

9. Key Findings for Uganda

Based on the analysis above, several key findings emerge for Uganda:

- **Reading is the main barrier to foundational learning in Uganda.** Numeracy proficiency is much higher than reading proficiency at both age 10 and in P4, and in most subregions fewer than 10% of children meet the reading MPL. The share of children proficient in *both* subjects therefore depends almost entirely on reading.
- **School enrolment and progression through school matter more than age alone.** Learning rises far more sharply from class to class than from age to age, and children aged 10 to 14 who are not enrolled are far less likely to reach the benchmarks than enrolled children (about one-fifth of the odds). This shows that time in school, not simply getting older, is linked to learning.
- **Location and household wealth matter far more than gender.** Gender gaps are small and vary in direction across subregions, while urban–rural gaps and wealth gaps are large and consistent. For example, 21.6% of children from the wealthiest households reached the benchmark in both subjects, compared with 1.6% from the poorest households, and 9.8% of urban P4 pupils did so, compared with 3.8% of rural P4 pupils.
- **Kampala stands out on nearly every indicator, but its sample is small.** It is the only subregion where a substantial share of children reach the benchmark in both subjects. Busoga and Acholi rank at or near the bottom on most indicators, and Bukedi, Lango and Toro also have low results on several indicators. Karamoja's picture is mixed: it is near the bottom for age-10 mathematics (22.4%) but ranks fifth for P4 mathematics (72.7%), which points mainly to low school enrolment in Karamoja.
- **Home language and support at home are strongly linked to achievement, but the links vary by context.** Among P4 pupils, 10.3% of those who speak English (the language of assessment) at home reached the benchmark in both subjects, compared with 3.1% of those who do not, and this link varies significantly by subregion. Having at least one parent who completed primary school (13.2% compared with 3.5%) and receiving help with homework (11.7% compared with 6.6%) show similar but geographically uneven links.
- **Disadvantages overlap rather than standing alone.** The children facing the steepest disadvantage (rural children, children from poorer households, out-of-school children and children who do not speak English at home) are often the same children. This points to a common set of underlying conditions, such as poverty, location and access to school, rather than any single factor acting alone.

10. Implications for Policy and Programming

10.1 Implications for Government

Findings point to reading, not mathematics, as the priority area for national investment. The Ministry of Education and Sports, working with the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) and district local governments,

should consider directing a larger share of curriculum, teacher training and early-grade resources towards reading instruction, particularly in the ten or more subregions where fewer than 10% of children reach the reading benchmark. Since school enrolment and progression through school are strongly linked to learning, strategies that reduce dropout, address over-age enrolment, help children return to school and support regular attendance should be treated as learning interventions in their own right, and not only as access interventions. The size of the differences between subregions (with Busoga and Acholi at or near the bottom on most indicators, Bukedi, Lango and Toro low on several, and Karamoja held back mainly by low enrolment) supports targeting resources to the subregions most in need rather than spreading them evenly across the country.

For SDG 4.1.1(a) reporting, the government should present both age-10 and P4 estimates, since each captures a different population (all children compared with enrolled children) and tells a materially different story about national progress. Given the modest and inconsistent gender gaps identified, government should be cautious about designing broad gender-targeted interventions and instead prioritise context-specific responses only where local data shows a persistent gender disadvantage.

10.2 Implications for NGOs and Partners

NGOs and partners should prioritise household- and community-level literacy support, such as expanding access to children's books and reading materials at home, which remain scarce. This assessment found clear links between parental education, help with homework and learning, although being read to at home was not significantly linked to learning overall. Because the wealth gap is steep, especially in reading, partners working in poorer communities should consider pairing literacy activities with efforts to address the underlying shortage of resources (materials, time and caregiver literacy), rather than relying on instruction alone. The finding that speaking English at home is strongly linked to achievement, with large differences between subregions, suggests that NGOs supporting multilingual or mother-tongue instruction should prioritise the subregions where this gap is largest, using Figure 12 to identify them. Programmes aiming to reach the most excluded children should take into account that living in a rural area, poverty and being out of school often occur together, so community-based or catch-up learning models that address several of these barriers at once may be more effective than those that address one. Given that the urban–rural gap is largest for reading and narrows somewhat with continued schooling, NGOs supporting supplementary or after-school reading programmes may achieve the greatest impact in rural subregions outside Kampala.

11. Conclusion

The 2025 ICAN–ICAR assessment shows that Uganda's children are, on average, closer to reaching the minimum proficiency level in numeracy than in literacy, and that this reading gap is the central obstacle to improving overall proficiency. While the data confirms many expected patterns (wealthier, urban and enrolled children with better-educated and more supportive parents tend to perform better), the size and consistency of these gaps vary considerably. Gaps linked to household wealth and school enrolment are large and consistent, gaps between places are large but vary locally, and gaps between girls and boys are small and depend on the context. Kampala's higher results on nearly every measure (based on a small

sample), set against persistently low achievement in subregions such as Acholi and Busoga, show that national averages can hide deeply unequal learning across the country.

These findings suggest that closing Uganda's foundational learning gap will require sustained attention to reading instruction, targeted support for rural and poorer communities, and strategies that keep children enrolled and progressing through school, recognising that the children furthest behind are often disadvantaged in more than one way at the same time. Continued monitoring through future ICAN–ICAR rounds, together with more detailed analysis by subregion and by groups of children, will be essential for tracking whether these gaps are narrowing and for ensuring that policy and programme responses reach the children who need them most.

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Annex 1: Data Tables

The tables in this annex show weighted percentages of children reaching the minimum proficiency level (MPL) in mathematics, reading and both subjects. The number of children assessed in each subregion (all ages) is shown in Table 2. The numbers of 10-year-olds and P4 pupils in each subregion are much smaller, especially in Kampala, so small differences between subregions, and results for small groups such as girls or boys in Kampala, should be read with caution. A value of 0 means that none of the children assessed in that group reached the benchmark. Confidence intervals and unweighted numbers for each cell are not shown in these tables.

Table A1: Percentage of 10-Year-Olds Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Subregion

Subregion	Mathematics (%)	Reading (%)	Both subjects (%)
Acholi	24.1	2.6	2.6
Ankole	50.1	5.0	5.0
Buganda North	38.2	3.2	3.2
Buganda South	47.9	10.8	9.6
Bukedi	21.9	1.5	1.5
Bunyoro	41.6	2.2	2.2
Busoga	12.3	1.4	0.0
Elgon	41.1	2.4	1.2
Kampala	57.8	44.6	44.6
Karamoja	22.4	7.5	7.5
Kigezi	36.1	6.8	6.8
Lango	28.3	1.6	1.6
Teso	28.8	6.4	6.4
Toro	19.6	3.8	3.8
West Nile	37.8	4.7	4.7

Table A2: Percentage of P4 Pupils Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Subregion

Subregion	Mathematics (%)	Reading (%)	Both subjects (%)
Acholi	41.0	2.9	2.9
Ankole	79.6	9.4	9.4
Buganda North	76.0	4.1	4.1
Buganda South	66.9	9.4	7.2
Bukedi	52.4	3.8	3.8
Bunyoro	76.1	5.5	5.5
Busoga	23.9	2.5	1.3
Elgon	51.8	4.4	4.4
Kampala	55.8	33.9	33.9
Karamoja	72.7	9.1	9.1
Kigezi	63.1	7.4	7.4
Lango	56.9	2.8	2.8

Subregion	Mathematics (%)	Reading (%)	Both subjects (%)
Teso	49.7	8.8	5.9
Toro	33.0	5.6	5.6
West Nile	75.3	7.7	6.6

Table A3: Percentage of 10-Year-Olds Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Subregion and Gender

Subregion	Gender	Mathematics (%)	Reading (%)	Both subjects (%)
Acholi	Girls	18.2	4.4	4.4
Ankole	Girls	56.3	5.9	5.9
Buganda North	Girls	37.2	5.6	5.6
Buganda South	Girls	44.3	9.7	7.3
Bukedi	Girls	22.2	3.2	3.2
Bunyoro	Girls	49.9	4.7	4.7
Busoga	Girls	12.8	0.0	0.0
Elgon	Girls	49.4	4.5	2.2
Kampala	Girls	61.3	61.3	61.3
Karamoja	Girls	21.4	0.0	0.0
Kigezi	Girls	50.0	5.0	5.0
Lango	Girls	37.4	3.1	3.1
Teso	Girls	33.0	11.0	11.0
Toro	Girls	16.1	0.0	0.0
West Nile	Girls	36.7	11.1	11.1
Acholi	Boys	32.7	0.0	0.0
Ankole	Boys	42.0	3.8	3.8
Buganda North	Boys	39.5	0.0	0.0
Buganda South	Boys	51.4	11.8	11.8
Bukedi	Boys	21.6	0.0	0.0
Bunyoro	Boys	34.5	0.0	0.0
Busoga	Boys	11.9	2.4	0.0
Elgon	Boys	31.3	0.0	0.0
Kampala	Boys	48.6	0.0	0.0
Karamoja	Boys	23.4	15.5	15.5
Kigezi	Boys	24.7	8.2	8.2
Lango	Boys	17.9	0.0	0.0
Teso	Boys	22.9	0.0	0.0
Toro	Boys	22.9	7.5	7.5
West Nile	Boys	38.6	0.0	0.0

Table A4: Percentage of P4 Pupils Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Subregion and Gender

Subregion	Gender	Mathematics (%)	Reading (%)	Both subjects (%)
Acholi	Girls	29.9	2.7	2.7
Ankole	Girls	78.9	11.8	11.8
Buganda North	Girls	72.7	4.0	4.0
Buganda South	Girls	75.4	9.8	7.7
Bukedi	Girls	42.9	5.9	5.9
Bunyoro	Girls	77.0	6.6	6.6
Busoga	Girls	26.4	0.0	0.0
Elgon	Girls	55.0	7.2	7.2
Kampala	Girls	75.0	50.0	50.0
Karamoja	Girls	55.3	0.0	0.0
Kigezi	Girls	70.7	6.4	6.4
Lango	Girls	52.8	2.4	2.4
Teso	Girls	55.5	14.0	9.3
Toro	Girls	37.3	7.3	7.3
West Nile	Girls	68.0	8.4	6.2
Acholi	Boys	53.9	3.1	3.1
Ankole	Boys	80.3	7.0	7.0
Buganda North	Boys	81.4	4.4	4.4
Buganda South	Boys	57.5	8.9	6.7
Bukedi	Boys	61.1	1.8	1.8
Bunyoro	Boys	74.9	4.1	4.1
Busoga	Boys	22.1	4.4	2.2
Elgon	Boys	46.8	0.0	0.0
Kampala	Boys	39.3	20.2	20.2
Karamoja	Boys	84.9	15.5	15.5
Kigezi	Boys	52.8	8.7	8.7
Lango	Boys	61.7	3.2	3.2
Teso	Boys	39.8	0.0	0.0
Toro	Boys	27.1	3.3	3.3
West Nile	Boys	81.2	7.2	6.9

Table A5: Percentage of 10-Year-Olds Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Subregion and Location

Subregion	Location	Mathematics (%)	Reading (%)	Both subjects (%)
Acholi	Rural	14.9	0.0	0.0
Ankole	Rural	45.4	0.0	0.0
Buganda North	Rural	37.3	1.1	1.1
Buganda South	Rural	40.4	11.3	9.7

Subregion	Location	Mathematics (%)	Reading (%)	Both subjects (%)
Bukedi	Rural	20.7	0.0	0.0
Bunyoro	Rural	40.4	2.8	2.8
Busoga	Rural	11.7	1.5	0.0
Elgon	Rural	46.9	0.0	0.0
Karamoja	Rural	9.6	0.0	0.0
Kigezi	Rural	17.5	3.5	3.5
Lango	Rural	27.3	0.0	0.0
Teso	Rural	25.7	7.3	7.3
Toro	Rural	24.2	3.4	3.4
West Nile	Rural	39.6	6.6	6.6
Acholi	Urban	50.0	10.0	10.0
Ankole	Urban	61.1	16.6	16.6
Buganda North	Urban	40.1	7.6	7.6
Buganda South	Urban	69.8	9.3	9.3
Bukedi	Urban	100.0	100.0	100.0
Bunyoro	Urban	45.5	0.0	0.0
Busoga	Urban	20.0	0.0	0.0
Elgon	Urban	29.4	7.3	3.6
Kampala	Urban	57.8	44.6	44.6
Karamoja	Urban	67.2	33.6	33.6
Kigezi	Urban	69.5	12.6	12.6
Lango	Urban	40.0	20.0	20.0
Teso	Urban	50.0	0.0	0.0
Toro	Urban	13.5	4.3	4.3
West Nile	Urban	33.4	0.0	0.0

Table A6: Percentage of P4 Pupils Reaching Minimum Proficiency, by Subregion and Location

Subregion	Location	Mathematics (%)	Reading (%)	Both subjects (%)
Acholi	Rural	34.1	1.8	1.8
Ankole	Rural	73.6	4.7	4.7
Buganda North	Rural	72.6	3.3	3.3
Buganda South	Rural	67.1	4.8	4.8
Bukedi	Rural	53.1	2.1	2.1
Bunyoro	Rural	74.6	4.6	4.6
Busoga	Rural	23.6	2.6	1.3
Elgon	Rural	54.4	0.0	0.0
Karamoja	Rural	54.6	0.0	0.0
Kigezi	Rural	61.2	9.6	9.6

Subregion	Location	Mathematics (%)	Reading (%)	Both subjects (%)
Lango	Rural	58.1	1.6	1.6
Teso	Rural	48.0	10.0	6.7
Toro	Rural	34.3	3.9	3.9
West Nile	Rural	81.3	11.5	11.5
Acholi	Urban	66.7	6.7	6.7
Ankole	Urban	95.6	22.0	22.0
Buganda North	Urban	86.2	6.6	6.6
Buganda South	Urban	66.5	19.2	12.4
Bukedi	Urban	44.4	22.2	22.2
Bunyoro	Urban	81.8	9.1	9.1
Busoga	Urban	33.3	0.0	0.0
Elgon	Urban	48.1	10.6	10.6
Kampala	Urban	55.8	33.9	33.9
Karamoja	Urban	91.0	18.4	18.4
Kigezi	Urban	65.7	4.4	4.4
Lango	Urban	40.0	20.0	20.0
Teso	Urban	62.5	0.0	0.0
Toro	Urban	29.8	9.7	9.7
West Nile	Urban	67.1	2.6	0.0

Annex 2: Socioeconomic Status Quintiles and Weighting

This annex explains how the household wealth (socioeconomic status, SES) index used in this report was built. The index was built using principal component analysis (PCA), a common statistical method for combining many household characteristics into a single wealth score when reliable data on household income or spending is not available. The analysis used 20 household characteristics covering housing quality, access to basic services and household assets, including roofing and wall materials, lighting and water sources, electricity and sanitation, and ownership of assets such as televisions, radios, mobile phones, smartphones, bicycles, motorcycles, vehicles and computers.

The index was calculated for households rather than for children, so that households with several children did not have more influence on it. The main summary score produced by PCA (the first principal component) was used as the SES index. Households with finished roofs and walls, electricity, televisions, smartphones and other assets tended to have higher scores, while households with basic roofs and walls and poorer lighting and water sources had lower scores. Higher scores therefore represent relatively wealthier households, and lower scores relatively poorer households.

This score was used to rank households from poorest to wealthiest, and five groups (quintiles) were created, from Quintile 1 (the poorest) to Quintile 5 (the wealthiest). The quintiles contained 881, 826, 874, 833 and 853 households, respectively. The groups are not exactly equal in size because some households had the same score at the boundaries between groups.

Each child was given the wealth group of his or her household, using the household identifier (HHID). Because the results are weighted to represent all children in Uganda, the share of children in each group is not exactly 20% (see Table 3 in the main text).

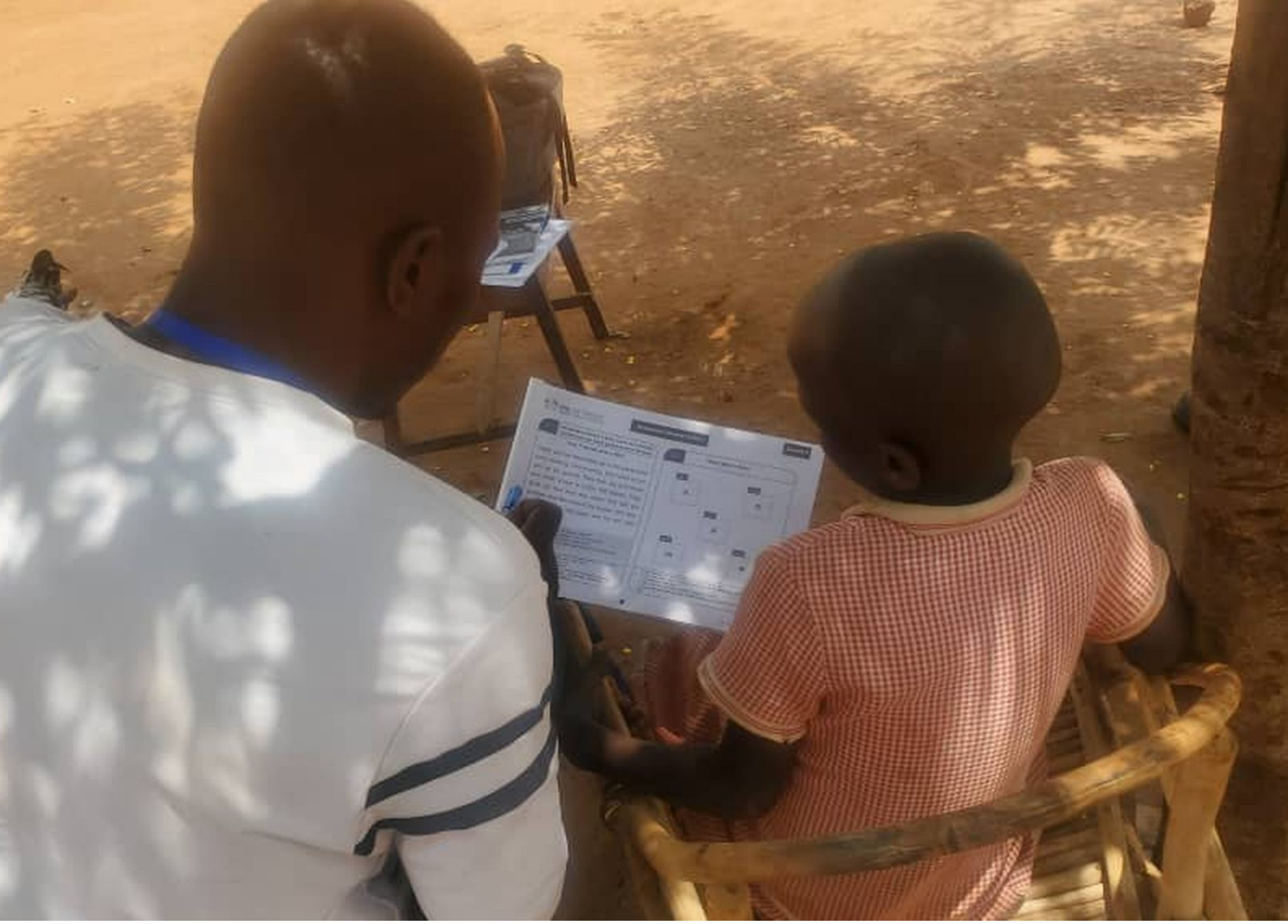
The SES index measures a household's wealth **relative** to other households, not poverty in absolute terms. The quintiles therefore show a household's position compared with other households represented in the assessment, and should not be read as matching national or international poverty lines.

Annex 3: Local Partner Organisations

The following 28 local partner organisations supported the 2025 ICAN–ICAR fieldwork in Uganda, including the mobilisation of communities and citizen volunteers (PAL Network, 2025). They are listed in alphabetical order.

Table A7: Local Partner Organisations that Supported the ICAN–ICAR Fieldwork in Uganda

Partner organisation	Partner organisation
1. African Rural Development Initiatives (ARDI)	15. Joy Initiatives Uganda (JOYI)
2. Change Lead Agency Social Support (CLASS)	16. Kapchorwa Civil Society Organisations Alliance (KACSOA)
3. Child Aid Uganda (CAU)	17. Kitaara Civil Society Organisation Network (KICSON)
4. Child2Youth Foundation (C2Y)	18. Kiyita Family Alliance for Development (KIFAD)
5. Children and Wives of Disabled Soldiers Association (CAWODISA)	19. Life Concern (LICO)
6. Christian Fellowship Ministries (CFM)	20. Literacy Action and Development Agency (LADA)
7. Citizens Initiative for Democracy and Development (CIDD)	21. Lusuganda Development Initiative (LUSUDI)
8. Community Development and Child Welfare Initiatives (CODI)	22. Church of Uganda North Karamoja Diocese
9. Forum for Early Childhood Development Association (FECDA)	23. Partners in Development and Centre for Holistic Transformation (PICOT)
10. Foundation for Inclusive Community Help (FICH)	24. Passion for Community Development (P4C)
11. Foundation for Open Development (FOD)	25. South West Initiative for Community Counselling (SWICCO)
12. Friends of Goodwill (FOG)	26. TAPA (Toil and Promote Agriculture)
13. Kitagata Voices of Hope and Empowerment Foundation (KiVOHE)	27. Teso Dioceses Planning and Development Office (COU-TEDDO)
14. Holistic Initiative for Community Development -Uganda (HOLD Uganda)	28. Uganda Eyenkya



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Uwezo Uganda

Corner House, Suite B1, Plot 436/437, Mawanda Road, Kamwokya, P.O. Box 33275, Kampala, Uganda

Email: info@uwezouganda.org

PAL Network

Daykio Plaza, First Floor, Room 1.5, Ngong Lane, Nairobi, Kenya · www.palnetwork.org · info@palnetwork.org