

The Priorities to Guarantee Sustainability of Universal Primary Education in Rwenzori Region in Western Uganda

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Abstract

This study examined priorities for sustainability of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the Rwenzori Region Western Uganda. Uganda has struggled to meet the requirements for sustainable primary education. Rwenzori is one region in Uganda that has been extremely affected by civil and tribal wars, disease and poverty among other social problems in the country. This study was guided by the Systems Theory as propounded by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in 1969. The target population for the study was primary school teachers, head teachers, School Management Committee Members (SMCM), Quality Assurance Officers, District Education Officers, District Inspectors of Schools and Officials (DISOs) from the Ministry of Education and Sports of Uganda. The sample was selected using probability and non-probability sampling techniques and a cross-sectional survey design was adopted in all sampled primary schools in the Rwenzori region. Qualitative and quantitative methodology guided the collection of reliable data and by use of a questionnaire and analysed using inferential and descriptive statistical methods. The findings of this study established that priorities were in place in some schools, especially those in semi urban areas to ensure the sustainability of UPE. These included: provision of funds, provision of good learning environment, good infrastructure; working to enhance students' interests in education; provision of good supervisory services, administration, accommodation and feeding programmes. However, these factors were not found to be sufficient to guarantee sustainability of UPE in the Rwenzori region and perhaps other regions in Uganda that experience similar challenges. In addition, the study found that adequate funding is very paramount to the success and sustainability of UPE in Uganda.

Key words: *Priorities, guarantee, sustainability, universal primary education*

Introduction

Universal Primary Education (UPE) is an international initiative first launched in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 to bring the benefits of education to “every citizen in every society” (Oonyu, 2012). The World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 reaffirmed and extended the Jomtien commitment, bringing a welcome emphasis on schooling quality while acknowledging that universal primary completion had not yet been reached. Universal primary completion and gender equity in primary and secondary education were affirmed again in that same year as a target in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Bruns, Alain & Ramahatra, 2003). After a decade of slow progress, the international community reaffirmed its commitment

to UPE in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000. This commitment was again voiced in September of the same year, when 189 countries and their partners adopted two UPE goals as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Although the MDGs number 2 and 3 refer only to issues of universal primary education and gender parity, respectively, it is generally recognized that achieving the goals goes hand in hand with supporting the full UPE commitment since education plays a critical role in their achievement (Oonyu, 2012).

Uganda's formal education system starts with seven years of primary school, followed by six years of secondary education, that is, senior one to senior four (Ordinary Level) and senior five and six (Advanced Level) which has been made free and compulsory. This level is succeeded by three to five years of university or tertiary education depending on the profession selected by the individual (Kakuru, 2003). Primary education is central to the whole system and to the life of citizens in general who embrace basic education in Uganda. It enables individuals to acquire literacy in terms of numeric and communication skills, as well as develop cultural, moral and spiritual values (MoES, 1999). It is for this reason that primary education has been made "free" through the UPE programme in Uganda.

Statement of the Problem

Commencing universal primary education (UPE) in Uganda was not a smooth affair and Mwasigye (2015) posits that the program was politicized to the extent that politicians had taken center-stage in policy formulation and monitoring of UPE. The issue of attrition rate was high at primary level. It was recommended that government should put in place measures for efficient completion of universal primary completion. The quality of education is low because of the high pupil to teacher ratio and low teachers' morale (Mwesigye, 2015). In that respect, the teachers' motivation remains a thorn in the flesh to the attainment of sustainability of UPE in Uganda. Further, corruption in Uganda remains a big challenge where funds are embezzled and Mwesigye (2015) further asserts that campaigns for household incomes are livid and the majority peasants. In Uganda, there is lack of a relevant curriculum to make the school product self-reliant which makes UPE program to be treated with pessimism by teachers, parents, and the general community. The study of Mwesigye (2015) suggested 8 years of skill-based primary education.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, 1,598,636 pupils were enrolled for Primary One in government-aided schools in 2006, but only 463,332 (29%) sat for national examinations at the end of seven years (2013). The question is: what happened to the 1,135,304 (71%) pupils who dropped out of the UPE system (Kagolo, 2012)?

It was, therefore, critical to examine how Uganda was doing in terms of ensuring sustainability of UPE and this study attempted to establish the extent to which Uganda as a country is attaining sustainability of its UPE programme in Ruwenzori Region.

Research Objective

The objective of this study was to identify the priorities to guarantee sustainability of UPE in Rwenzori Region Western Uganda.

Literature Review

Factors Influencing Sustainability of UPE in Uganda.

The investments made by the Ugandan government in the education sector are facilitated by the introduction of the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) and General Budget Support (GBS). SWAp and GBS have helped in pooling of funds and have created the conditions for a more focused coordinated and efficient approach. In this way, SWAp and GBS have contributed to the feasibility of free primary education and the large investment programmes needed to support the resulting increase in enrolment (IOB, 2008).

Government Commitment

The government of Uganda has made serious strides in the implementation of the UPE programme. Some of these steps include: adoption of the sector-wide approach to funding education in order to maximize benefits; decentralization of governance and management of education; adoption of UPE in 1997; expansion of infrastructure in schools; introduction of affirmative action towards the education of the girl-child and vulnerable groups; promotion of private-public partnerships, and promotion of guidance and counselling in schools. It is also noteworthy that fourteen (14) Primary Teachers' Colleges, among other initiatives, have been established to meet the increased teacher requirement brought about by the UPE programme. The government has also decentralized the management of adult literacy and both primary and secondary education, although the implementation of the latter has not been fully done. Apart from improving participation, decentralization strengthens supervision. Despite the decentralization drive, some aspects of management remain centralized (Oonyu, 2012).

External Funding

Since 1999, the government of Uganda, aided by its partners, has mobilized resources to improve the quality of education in general and primary education in particular. Increased financing has enabled the sector to implement programmes such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), to build capacity in MoES as well at district level, and to establish strong partnerships between the public and private sector. The MoES developed two sector plans, the Education Strategic Investment Plan (ESIP 1998-2003) and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2004-2015) meant to improve access, quality, equity and efficiency in the delivery of sector services (IOB, 2006).

Together with other international donors, Irish Aid is working with the Ugandan education authorities to improve the education system, ensuring lasting change.

The agency assists in educational programmes such as addressing the low levels of basic skills, like numerical reasoning and literacy, through curriculum reform and increasing the number of trained teachers, thereby reducing class sizes. In 2007, Irish Aid contributed over €9 million to the Ugandan education sector and also provided technical assistance (IOB, 2006).

Community Participation and Commitment towards the UPE Programme

The history of Uganda's formal education shows that parents and community members have tirelessly contributed towards the construction of schools for their children. They make the bricks and tiles, carry the water, roof the buildings and eventually provide finishing for the school buildings. This shows their commitment to making UPE programme grow and develop and currently, schools rely on community participation for their success. Parents are increasingly more enlightened and are becoming more vocal, demanding accountability on the methods of teaching and the content taught to their children. Parents are also keener on how the fees they pay are being spent by schools. Above all, parents are interested in helping improve the quality of education their children receive. This is sign that UPE programme can survive beyond political influences among other factors (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2001a).

Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports, within the reform, has articulated the need for parents to take interest and get more involved in their children's learning. This is a crucial need since parents are their children's first and most influential teachers. The ministry argues that parents must be empowered to actively participate in making learning more effective, qualitative and interesting. The ministry has, therefore, developed training materials that will guide parents to improve the quality of education. The training approaches are easy to follow; they are participative and capable of generating insightful discussion with parents, drawing on their rich experience. It is interesting to note that Uganda's UPE is thriving regardless of the challenges it encounters (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2001a).

School Infrastructure

Education is a basic need and a basic right to all citizens of Uganda. In Uganda, performance ranks high on the national agenda, with educators and policy makers focusing on testing, accountability, curriculum reform and teacher quality, school choice and other related concerns. Conspicuously, there has been no evaluation of how school conditions affect teaching and learning, even though extensive literature exists that links school facilities to the quality of education and to teacher morale and teacher productivity. Random trials have provided evidence from several developing countries. In Nicaragua, workbooks and radio instruction raised pupils' mathematics scores (Jamison, Searle, Galda & Heyneman, 1981). Text books raised test scores in the Philippines, but in Kenya text books have had effects only among the best students, perhaps because reading of text books is difficult for most students (Glewwe, Kremer, & Moulin, 2005).

Examining Indonesia's school construction programme, Duflo (2001) has found that the large scale construction of (primary) schools led to increase in educational attainment. This programme was designed to place more schools in regions with a relatively low school density. A similar programme focusing on underserved regions such as the North Eastern and rural districts of Kenya could promote increased secondary school enrolment. In Uganda, between 2000 and 2005, the total number of classrooms increased by 60% as a result of the continued construction of classrooms under the School Facilities Grant (SFG). Approximately 80% of the classrooms were built under the SFG. Between July 1999 and July 2005, the MoES built approximately 33,000 classrooms. Their quality also improved. This implies proper infrastructure is very crucial in creating a good environment for learning. However, in Uganda there is in some regions proper infrastructures but enrolment and completion rates are still lacking, one example being the Karamoja region.

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design which is useful in assessing practices, attitudes, knowledge and beliefs of a population in relation to a particular event. From the population frame, the required number of subjects, respondents, elements or institutions, were selected in order to make a sample size. The research was conducted in four (4) out of seven (7) districts of the Rwenzori Region, namely: Kabarole, Kyenjojo, Kasese, and Kyegegwa. The four districts were selected by use of stratified random sampling technique. The broader districts of Kasese and Bundibugyo and Ntoroko were stratified together because they had similar features of high levels of refugees, rebel insurgencies, civil wars and diseases like Ebola, among others. One district was then selected using a simple random technique. Kyenjojo and Kamwenge were stratified together as inland districts of Rwenzori Region, then a simple random was done and one district was picked to represent both districts. Kabarole being a modern district with well-established schools and with its urban environment was purposively selected as an urban district and is the mother district of all other six districts in the Rwenzori Region. However, Kyegegwa as one of the youngest districts in the region was also purposively picked. The district was considered useful in revealing the challenges and the opportunities in implementation of UPE.

The four selected districts had a total of 723 UPE primary schools of which total of thirty (30) primary schools were selected. The schools selected had to be located either in the rural or peri-urban area. Most UPE schools in Uganda have homogeneous characteristics depending on the location. Because the urban and rural schools have almost similar characteristics, the research picked schools in both areas of Rwenzori Region. Homogeneity of characteristics of all UPE schools in the country and also convenience played a big part in the selection. Of all the government owned or supported primary schools, 98% are in rural areas and only 2% are in town areas of Rwenzori. These percentages represent regional and country patterns and, therefore, majority of schools selected for this study were in rural areas.

Ten schools were randomly selected from each district; nine (9) were from the majority rural and one from urban schools. Only government aided schools were used in this study. The findings from the four districts were generalized to all the UPE schools in the Rwenzori Region. The head teachers of all the targeted schools were purposively included as respondents in the study as ground implementers and supervisors of the UPE programme in the Rwenzori Region. Seven teachers were randomly picked from all levels, that is, from Primary One (1) to Seven (7). Teachers are ground implementers of primary education curriculum in Uganda and were, therefore, important in giving information on how the UPE policy is affecting the curriculum. Out of the total pupils' population in the thirty schools, the study randomly picked ten (10) prefects to represent the pupils' body from each school; prefects gave opinions on how UPE programme was affecting their lives. Students were considered direct beneficiaries of the policy and had concrete experience on how UPE is affecting them.

Research Instruments

The researcher employed a triangulation method of data collection in order to increase the validity and reliability of data collected. The study relied on primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was collected through questionnaires, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations. Secondary data was obtained through a review of documents from UNESCO, MoES, World Bank, UWEZO-Uganda, UNICEF, The World Bank and other relevant literature.

Research Findings

Priorities to Guarantee Sustainability of UPE

The study sought to establish the priorities put in place to guarantee the sustainability of UPE in the study area. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table1. *Head Teachers Perceptions on Priorities to Guarantee UPE Sustainability*

Statement	Frequency (%)
Do you have pupils in your school with special needs?	25 (100)
If yes, is there special consideration for meeting their learning needs?	25 (100)
Do you have adequate school infrastructure in terms of classrooms, library and Staff houses to ensure quality education?	0 (0)
Is the attitude of parents towards the education of the girl-child enhanced?	25 (100)
Are there special programmes for meeting learning needs of the girl-child	25 (100)

As shown in Table 1, the priorities put in place to guarantee the sustainability of UPE in the study area, all the 25 (100%) head teachers indicated that they had pupils with special needs and were making appropriate considerations to meet their learning needs; did not have adequate infrastructure in terms of classrooms, library

and staff houses to ensure quality education; were enhancing the general attitudes of parents towards the girl-child and were also putting in place programmes to meet the learning needs of the girl-child.

From the research findings obtained from the questionnaire, the gender sensitive issues that affected the girl-child's pursuit of education included guidance and counselling, and sensitizing girls on abstinence. All of the, 25 (100%), respondents agreed that to improve the quality of education in UPE schools, all stakeholders should be actively involved.

Regarding adequacy of the government funding for UPE programmes, all the 25 (100%), respondents reported that government funding was insufficient. Another funds-related problem mentioned was the embezzlement of funds by some education officials in collaboration with politicians. The respondents emphasized that funding is a key priority in ensuring UPE sustainability and was the duty of government to ensure the utilization of allocated funds was well supervised and that the funds were used for the intended purposes.

All the head teachers (100%) asserted that there were good inspectional services being used by school inspectors and that these were crucial in monitoring of the curriculum implementation and usage of available UPE resources. Thus supervision of UPE activities in the school environment was viewed as one of the key factors in ensuring sustainability of the programme.

The study further sought to find out from teachers the best indicators of sustainability of the UPE programme. The results are shown in the Table 2.

Table 2 *Teachers' Views on Indicators of Sustainable*

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
Stable enrolments	105(42.5)	37(15)	37(15)	34(13.8)	34(13.8)
Good retention strategies of pupils	105(42.5)	37(15)	37(15)	34(13.8)	34(13.8)
No drop-out	25(10.3)	101(41)	47(19.2)	19(7.7)	54(21.8)
High levels of progression	42(16.9)	122(49.4)	45(18.2)	13(5.2)	25(10.4)
High levels of literacy	23(9.2)	117(47.4)	52(21.1)	0(0)	55(22.4)
Good Performance in primary level	37(15)	95(38.8)	59(23.8)	3(1.3)	52(21.3)
High levels of transition to secondary	0(0)	44(17.7)	84(34.2)	9(3.8)	109(44.3)
High levels of completion	13(5.1)	47(19)	41(16.5)	28(11.4)	118(48.1)
Good learning environment with quality infrastructure	43(17.3)	36(14.8)	9(3.7)	36(14.8)	122(49.4)
Good motivation levels of teaching and non-teaching staff	48(19.5)	54(22)	12(4.9)	6(2.4)	126(51.2)

As shown in the table 2, majority of the teachers strongly agreed that the best indicators of sustainability of the UPE programme are stable enrolments and good retention strategies of pupils. These two indicators were attested to by 105 (42.5%) teachers who strongly agreed and 37 (15%) who agreed in both cases. Moreover, 25 (10.3%) teachers strongly agreed and 101 (41%) agreed that the best indicator was no drop-out for learners. Reinforcing this argument, 42 (16.9%) teachers strongly agreed and another 122 (49.4%) agreed that high levels of progression for learners in school is an indicator of sustainability for UPE. Thirty-seven (15%) teachers strongly agreed and 95(38.8%) teachers agreed that the existence of measures to guarantee good performance in primary leaving examinations (PLE) was an indicator of sustainability of UPE.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the best indicators of sustainability of the UPE programme are stable enrolments for pupils and good retention strategies. The key priorities put in place to guarantee the sustainability of UPE in the study area were inclusive education, having adequate infrastructure and enhancing attitudes of parents and teachers through communication. It was also concluded that failure to have adequate of those key priority factors would crumble the education system.

The study also concluded that, guidance and counselling is key to enhancing students' attitude towards education, especially the girl child. Funding is also an important element in propelling sustainability of universal primary education in the Rwenzori Region. Material and financial funds are very vital if they are well utilized by the administrators.

The Study concludes that the supervision of the UPE programme has been effective to date. Most programme inspectors such as DEOs and DISOs among others are doing their work well. This made teachers and head teachers to remain accountable and to focus on providing quality teaching and learning since the curriculum is highly adhered to. These constitute some of the demotivating factors to their teaching morale.

Recommendations

This study strongly recommends to responsible UPE policy makers, funders, and implementers to ensure there is sufficient funding and that curbing of corruption be done with much urgency to ensure sustainability of UPE in the Rwenzori region and other parts of the country. Funding is paramount to the success and sustainability of UPE in Uganda. The government of Uganda needs to provide sufficient financial resource to UPE program and to take UPE very seriously since it is a key determinant for the economic growth and development of the Country. It is also recommended that stakeholders should maintain and enhance the pillars that were found to be vital for sustainability of universal primary education.

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