

Universalizing Primary Education in Uganda Is It Beneficial and Sustainable?

Mary Goretti Nakabugo, Charles Opolot-Okurut and Connie Masembe Ssebbunga

Makerere University, Uganda

Makerere University, Uganda

Albert Byamugisha

Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda

Abstract

Uganda has targeted Universal Primary Education since its independence. In achieving such a goal the country introduced free primary education in 2003 and enrolments dramatically increased. However, in terms of quality, the education provided is not satisfactory. This paper examines the challenges in financing the implementation of free primary education and verifies the actual learning conditions at the school level with particular reference to the transition from primary to secondary education. The government tends to focus on the quantitative expansion of education, paying less attention to value, significance and effects of education for individuals. Furthermore, the significance of universalizing primary education is discussed from the view point of people in the rural community. It is important to take interest not only in the "quantitative expansion of education for the nation" but also the "qualitative growth of individuals for the community." Such emphasis may further enhance the benefits of schooling and encourage sustainable educational development.

Key Words: Primary Education, Universal Primary Education (Upe), Education

15-17 November, 2019

Rotterdam, Netherlands

Introduction

Universal Primary Education (UPE) is an international development goal which all countries are expected to achieve by 2020. The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in 1990 is the basis of current discussions on UPE. At that conference, the importance of 'basic education' was recognized and a new concept of 'basic learning needs' for people, not limited to schooling, was proposed. Article I of the World Declaration on Education for All adopted at the conference clearly states that "Every person—child, youth and adult—shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs", focusing on value, significance, and effects of education for individuals. Ministry of Education and Sports set the goal with the statement "Ensuring that by 2020 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality." This was further reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Uganda has been trying to achieve UPE as a national goal since its independence. Reintroduction of free primary education in 2003 dramatically increased the number of children attending school.

It was in the 2007 that this commitment to universalizing primary education took the form of free primary education for the first time; such free education was partially implemented to cover children in Grades 1 to 4. Educational opportunity. However, what is the actual benefit each child receives? The quality of education is said to be deteriorating further and primary school completion contributes little to becoming employed. Irrespective of labor demand, it does appear to induce a great enthusiasm for secondary education and further education more so than ever before.

This paper first discusses the challenges in financing the implementation of free primary education as well as issues in maintaining quality education. Secondly, actual learning conditions of primary education at the school level and enthusiasm for secondary education are examined with examples from the Apac District. Finally, the significance of UPE from the viewpoint of people in the rural community is reconsidered to suggest the potential and possibilities of its social benefits.

Methods of Financing Free Primary Education At the national level

In the implementation of free primary education the Ugandan Ministry of Education established a system in which all about 28,000 public primary schools can receive capitation grants straight from the Ministry through bank accounts. Which is earmarked for purchasing educational materials? such as textbooks and notebooks, as well as for the repairing of school facilities and to ensure quality assurance. The total grant amount is determined by the number of pupils enrolled, whereby, large-scale schools enjoy advantages over schools with fewer pupils. Along with abolishing school fees, the government strictly prohibited each school from collecting levies or any money from parents.

At the school level

Under the free primary education policy, each school was directed to keep two accounts to receive the capitation grants from the Ministry of Education. There are relatively well equipped primary schools in Uganda for example, which were historically established for Europeans and Asians before Uganda's independence.

Results of Growing Number of School Children and the Quality of Education The followings were key results free primary education intervention faced:

- Because of acute teacher shortages, teachers were forced to combine classes for a number of grades.
- Some schools had to introduce double shifts to cater to the increased enrolments. Too few classrooms were available to divide the classes.
- Teachers were less motivated due to increased workloads and the scrapping of extra tuition, which was a major source of their income.
- This contributed to a decline in the quality of education as it also provided teachers with additional time to complete the syllabus.

15-17 November, 2019
Rotterdam, Netherlands

- It is rather difficult for teachers to effectively manage large classes. Teacher pupil interaction was minimal, resulting in a disadvantage for slow learners. There were also serious disciplinary problems with overage children;
- Because of free education, some parents came to believe that the government would take full responsibility for education. They became apathetic to all school activities, making effective school management difficult;
- Grants from the government were not distributed in the new school term when schools needed funds, nor was the amount sufficient. The use of funds was uniformly specified, which did not reflect the actual needs of each school.

Although the positive impact of free primary education in providing new learning opportunities for out-of-school children should not be undermined, it seemed as if the Ministry of Education and aid agencies were not particularly concerned about the deteriorating quality of education.

Discussion

Primary education is a child's basic right. Thereby, universal access has become an international development goal. Nonetheless, the actual curriculum of primary school has been given only slight attention and little is known about classroom interaction except the typical assumption that teaching is teacher-centered. The actual pursuit of educational goals may differ from 'education' conceptualized as 'basic learning needs' or 'children's rights'. Primary schooling is geared towards preparation for the transition to secondary school, and more specifically

Consequently, schools influenced by such an examination system automatically resemble preparatory schools for scoring highly on tests. It is reasonable that primary schooling tends to focus on examinations because of the fact that going on to a secondary school of 'good standing' has special importance as a critical determinant of one's future life. Primary schools are graded according to the results of the UNEB in each district and division. Every education office is busy making league tables. Such examination results are primarily a concern for

15-17 November, 2019
Rotterdam, Netherlands

teachers and head teachers in particular, which inevitably results in an examination-oriented school life. The teaching style of each class is affected greatly by the examination. In higher grades, classes are conducted in order to prepare for the examinations, using questions from past papers, rather than referring to the class syllabi.

Conclusion

It is an education geared to tapping each individual's talents and potential, and developing learners' personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies for children in rural Uganda, education functions as a tool to exit traditional society. Nonetheless, they understand the importance of schooling now and are keen in sending their children to school, and children study hard to meet their parents' expectations in some way.

Girls, in particular, often have a definite wish to exit traditional society. Primary education in Uganda, which often focuses on passing examinations, creates a feeling among teachers that learning at primary school is wasteful if one fails to advance to secondary school. Primary school head teachers wish for as many of their pupils to go on to good secondary schools as possible, which results in a high evaluation for their schools and for themselves. That observation corresponds to the reality that acquiring qualifications of higher learning is given priority over educational needs for individuals in this education conscious society. Personal growth and community. It would be better to take more interest not only in the quantitative expansion of education for the nation' but also in the development of communities based on the 'qualitative growth of individuals for the community.' Such emphasis may enhance the benefits of schooling and must ensure sustainable educational development. It may also suggest that we need to (re)consider the importance and value of primary schooling in the local contexts, rather than national or global ones. This is a serious challenge for many aid agencies which have been supporting to achieve UPE.

References.

Michaelowa, K. (2001). Primary education quality in Franco-phone Sub-saharan Africa: determinants of learning achievement and efficiency considerations. *World Development*, 29, 1699-1716.

MoE&S (2005a). A comprehensive analysis of basic education in Uganda. Kampala: Ministry of Education and Sports.

MoE&S (2005b). Education Sector Review. Kampala: Ministry of Education and Sports.

Nakabugo, M. G. (2003). Closing the gap? Continuous assessment in primary education in Uganda.

Thesis presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate School in Humanities, University of Cape Town.

Nye, B., Hedges, L. V. & Konostntopoulos, S. (2001). Are effects of small classes cumulative?

Evidence from a Tennessee experiment. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94 (6), 336-345.

O'Sullivan, M. C. (2006). Teaching large classes: The international evidence and a discussion of some good practices in Ugandan primary schools. *International Journal of Educational Development*,

26, 24-37.

Race, P. (1998). Practical pointers on peer assessment. In S. Brown (Ed.), *Peer assessment in practice*.

SEDA Paper 102, Birmingham, SEDA. Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (Eds.) (2001).

Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice. London: Sage Publications.

Robinson, G. E. (1990). Synthesis of research on the effects of class size. *Educational Leadership*, 47(7), 80-90.

London: Temple Smith. Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence (1992). *Teaching large classes well: Solutions from your peers*.

2nd International Conference on
TEACHING, LEARNING and EDUCATION



15-17 November, 2019

Rotterdam, Netherlands

The Penn State ID Newsletter. [<http://www.aus.edu/fdc/docs/articles/Teaching%20Large%20Classes20Well.pdfj>] (17 October 2006)

Smith, B. (2000). Quantity matters: Annual instructional time in an urban school system. *Educational Administration Quarterly*. 36(5), 652-682.