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Contents	Page
Lecturers Publishing Students' Research: An Authorship Policy Gap <i>Emmanuel Chinamasa</i>	295
A Tracer Study of Home Economics Graduates in Botswana: A Case of the University of Botswana <i>M. S. Nnyepi, F. M. Mthombeni, S. E. O. Mahgoub, D. Dumba & D. Mothobi</i>	311
Factors Influencing Student Nurses' Performance in the Final Practical Examination at Gweru School of Nursing <i>Martha Gumbo & Emmanuel Chinamasa</i>	325
An Exploratory Study on the School Related Challenges Faced by Street Children in Harare <i>Samson Mhizha & Tinashe Muromo</i>	350
Challenges to Quality Primary and Secondary Education in Uganda <i>Anthony Mugagga Muwagga, Nicholas Itaaga & Wycliffe Scott Wafula</i>	369
Managing Vandalism in Day Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe <i>Emmanuel Chinamasa</i>	387
The Paradigm for Effective School Supervision in Secondary Schools in Nigeria <i>N. S. Okoroma</i>	404
Variability in the Second Language Acquisition of Verb Morphology by Shona Speakers of English: A Developmental Analysis <i>Muzi Mlambo</i>	427

Challenges to Quality Primary and Secondary Education in Uganda

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Abstract

The survey and discussion focus on the challenges to quality education in Uganda. It is over 136 years since formal education was introduced in Uganda by the Christian Missionaries in 1877 and 1879. These were Anglican and Roman Catholic Missionaries respectively. Given the plethora of implicit and explicit challenges faced by the entire education system and its products, it is evident that the system has not fully played its role in transforming Uganda into a country which the inceptors of education hoped it would edify. The survey was carried out in Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern Uganda. Data was collected using questionnaires and observation check lists. A cross sectional survey design involved 5 primary and 5 secondary schools in each region; key stakeholders namely District Education Officers (DEOS), inspectors of schools, Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) officials, and parents. Data collected was analysed using percentages and some salient qualitative statements recorded. The findings revealed that although there has been a significant rise in student and pupil numbers both in primary and secondary schools, the entire primary and secondary education sub-systems are riddled with many challenges. The challenges are looked at from the sociological, economic and philosophical dimensions. It was therefore recommended that there is need to overhaul the entire education system in terms of pedagogical and non-pedagogical over-heads in the schools.

Introduction

There might be no single government in the world which does not attach great importance to the education of its citizens. In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) there are two types of education namely: formal and informal. Informal education, though not as complex as the current education,

formed the pivot for societal continuity and was a means through which different societies transmitted values, beliefs, and knowledge from one generation to another. On the other hand, formal education is defined differently by various scholars. John Dewey defines it as that which increases social efficiency; while Aristotle refers to it as the creation of a sound mind in a sound body. On the other hand, Chomsky (2000), in critiquing contemporary education, argues that what we call education could be mere mis-education. Paulo Freire (1970) categorises education in developing world as that which imprisons thinking and creativity in contrast to the informal education. Education has over the ages been seen as a key ingredient to sustainable development and living. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasises that everyone has a right to education. Unfortunately this does not seem to be the case for most of SSA.

Formal education in sub-Saharan Africa was introduced by the Christian missionaries with an aim of evangelising the so called primitive and pagan Africans, incepting literacy, and edifying Western civilisation. Initial formal education, for example in East Africa, came with lots of challenges. Missionary activity mainly concentrated in areas of proximity to the political centres and in areas of those tribes which collaborated with the colonial governments. Areas deemed unfriendly or uncooperative to the missionaries or the colonial government were denied a chance to access formal education. In Uganda, for example, some parts of Northern Uganda, North Eastern Uganda and some parts of South Western Uganda did not have access to education until much later (Ssekamwa, 2000; Furley, 1991; Mamdani, 1999). In the long run, the missionary and colonial government educational policies have created lopsided educational development and distortions which have had everlasting impact on Uganda's postcolonial education affecting its internal and external efficiency, and the implied quality. To date many countries in sub-Saharan Africa allocate a greater percentage of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to education; and many have tried to adopt policies which address issues of quality and equity in educational access. However, issues of education quality, equity, technical, internal, and external efficiency for most of sub-Saharan African countries have remained elusive.

In most of SSA school enrolment at all levels, that is, early childhood development (ECD), primary, and secondary, have significantly increased following the adoption and inception of Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE) and the liberalisation of tertiary education. Umoh (2003), for example, reveals that there has been dramatic increase in the number of students enrolled in the UPE program. He reports that in East Africa in general, and Uganda, in particular, pupil numbers have more than doubled since 1997, resulting in a net enrolment rate of 91%. This represents an enrolment increase from 2.5 million in 1997 to 6.5 million in 2000. He cites the finding of Elwana (2000) who also notes that the education sector's percentage of the national budget has grown from 25.3% in 1998/1999 to 27.5% in 1999/2000, a fact also held by Hallak et al., (2000). By 2012 these percentages have oscillated between 27.5% to 30%. These facts are corroborated by the 1997 -2006 reports from the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) which show that primary school enrolment had hit a record 7.6 million children by 2003. The number has kept on increasing to over 8 million children in UPE schools by 2012 (MoES, Uganda, 2012 Annual Education Reports).

Uganda introduced UPE in 1997. This saw a drastic increase in primary school enrolment exceeding 120%. The overwhelming response to UPE created a plethora of challenges which have persisted to date and have become a serious concern to almost all primary education stakeholders. These include:

- ❖ high dropout rates of nearly 50 percent especially of the girl child
- ❖ an above normal 1:110 teacher-pupil ratio
- ❖ inadequate infrastructure as classrooms are too congested and in some areas classes are still conducted under trees
- ❖ the disadvantaged children are not yet fully benefiting from the programme
- ❖ many parents in most rural and peri-urban areas of Uganda still do not appreciate the value of UPE

According to Umoh (2003), three major concrete failures of UPE in Uganda are the policy on primary education, limited funding and

inadequacies in administration. These all have implications on issues of quality and equity.

In order to offset the challenges created by UPE the Uganda government introduced Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007. Unfortunately the challenges met in UPE have been passed on to USE. Actually from the United Nations Annual Report 2007, sub-Saharan Africa is not on track to achieve most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) education inclusive (<http://unstat.un.org>). It is further noted that in practice, UPE and USE are not yet universal and even in the private or 'elite' government aided and private primary and secondary schools. The quality of education is still wanting, especially for most rural and peri-urban areas of Uganda. Salient among the indicators of constrained quality of education are the very movers of this education, namely, teachers who Akankwasa (2002) refers to as dysfunctional.

Reflection on quality education in Uganda

Formal education in Uganda was introduced by the Anglican Christian Missionaries in 1877 and the Roman Catholic Missionaries in 1879 (Ssekamwa, 1997). The introduction of formal education created a dual educational product: one schooled in traditional indigenous education as well as in Western knowledge and value stances. This paper looks at the quality of education in Uganda from the philosophical, economic, and sociological dimensions.

In philosophising about education one looks at the quality of knowledge, values, and beliefs enshrined within the pedagogical and non-pedagogical provisions within and without the school environment. Both the experiential and metaphysical universe in which the teaching and learning take place is value laden; and according to Aiftinca (2004) values and beliefs surround man's social, economic and political environs. In discussing education at times scholars forget to create a clear linkage between the social, economic and philosophical pivots of education as the ground for the many challenges therein. On the other hand the sociological dimension of education involves looking at education as an academic discipline that is concerned with

the function, structure, and role of social institutions and the social processes. It is also concerned with social behaviour within groups of different education stakeholders. The sociological perspective is an attempt to analyse the social actions and social factors in society that influence teaching and learning in educational institutions. The interaction between social factors is a salient factor when examining the theory and practice of education. It is the key tool in analysing the school environment, nature and attitude of parents towards the education of their children in terms of gender (Ezewu, 1986).

The economic educational dimension emphasises that, among the influential factors in educational provision, funding is paramount in any educational system (Ayot & Briggs, 1992; Psacharopoulos, 1985). In the developed economies, where education is well funded, their systems do perform better and serve the needs and aspirations of such societies compared to the third world countries (Mingat & Tan, 1996). Furthermore, educational economists like Levin (1974); Natarajan (1993); Okun (1975) and Sachs & Larrain (1993) argue that natural resources, on their own, cannot guarantee economic development without human capital. This is the active factor of production, and they argue further that since education produces human capital, it is a determinant of the development process. The quality of education that one acquires will consequently determine the quality of human capital created in such an individual and therefore his/her productivity (Bell et al., 1999).

It may be very hard to define precisely quality education. In discussing quality education in the Ugandan context we shall look at the following as salient assumptions on quality education. We assume that quality education should be able to:

- ▲ Provide sustainable development and this involves schools which adhere to and positively propel child-rights, peace education, micro and macro-economic social and political development
- ▲ Offer present and future opportunities to a greater majority of its graduates at all levels
- ▲ Provide a safe environment for both the learners and teachers

(friendly schools)

- ▲ Provide lifelong learning, that is, it does not begin or end in class or in final national examinations
- ▲ Cater for and provide equal opportunities for both the girl and boy child (gender parity)
- ▲ Respond to the immediate and future needs of the country community namely the social, political, and economic needs
- ▲ Produce critical and reflective persons since it is from the critical and reflective practice that innovations and inventions originate
- ▲ Be powered by teachers who are empowered and in turn they are able to empower others
- ▲ Enhance the stakeholders' holistic discipline, that is, in an ideal sense, it is not only teachers and students who learn when at school but the entire society is able to have spill over benefits including implicit and explicit multiplier effects as a result of this education
- ▲ Enable society to overcome, both in the short and long run, challenges of poverty, conflict, nation building, cohesion, and patriotism
- ▲ Create a society which is responsive to health challenges such as child health, substance/drug use and abuse, adolescent resilience, HIV/AIDS and other epidemics, immunisation of adults and children, nutrition, family and parenting

Methodology

The study adopted a cross sectional survey design and utilised both primary and secondary data in order to inform the reflections on quality of education in Uganda. The survey was carried out in Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern Uganda. Data were collected using questionnaires and observation check lists. It targeted five primary and five secondary schools in each region totalling fifty schools; key stakeholders namely District Education Officers (DEOS), inspectors of schools, Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) officials, and parents. The sample was either purposively or conveniently sampled

and totalled 68 key stakeholders. Collected data were analysed using percentages and some salient qualitative statements were recorded and interpreted in the report.

Challenges to quality education in Uganda

Challenges to quality primary and secondary school education in Uganda are deciphered from the responses different stakeholders gave in response to the question: *Does Uganda's education system make the above assumptions a reality?* From the different responses the key areas in which quality was discussed and seen to be prevalent or non-prevalent were: the Uganda government educational policies, teacher training programmes, teacher school-practice, the role different education stakeholders play like participation of the community, parents and other boards of governors, school management committees, inspectors of schools, Ministry of Education and Sports officials and the environment in which teachers operate and actual pedagogy takes place.

Uganda education policy and practice

This section draws its reflections from the answers to the question: *Do the different stakeholders know government policy on education?*

The education stakeholders involved in the study included a purposively selected sample of members of school management committees (SMC), board of governors (BOG), District Education Officers, (DEOS), inspectors of schools, school chaplains and Imams, parents, teachers, head teachers, sub-county chiefs, school children, and the community around the school. The survey singled out the listed Acts, education policies, regulations and guidelines as key in the analysis of quality education in Uganda. These are listed below:

Uganda's Education Acts

- 1) The Government White Paper on Education (1992)
- 2) The constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995)
- 3) The Education (Pre-Primary, Primary and Post-Primary) Act (2008)
- 4) The Business Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) Act(2008)

- 5) Education Service Act (2002)
- 6) National Curriculum Development Act (2000)
- 7) Uganda National Examinations Act (1983)
- 8) The Children's Statute (1996)

Policies, regulations and guidelines

- 1) Pre-service training policy
- 2) Early childhood development teacher education and training policy
- 3) Primary teacher education and training policy
- 4) Secondary teacher education and training policy
- 5) Gender in education policy
- 6) School health policy
- 7) Special needs policy
- 8) Guidance and counselling guidelines
- 9) Guidelines on terms, conditions and teachers code of conduct
- 10) Guidelines on policy, planning, roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the implementation of universal primary education

The different stakeholders were asked two questions, namely:

Do you have knowledge about the following Education Acts, policies and guidelines?

The study findings are revealed in Table 1.

Table 1

Key stake holders' response to the question: 'Do you know the following education policies?'

Stakeholders	Uganda's Education Acts	Policies, Regulations and Guidelines
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government White Paper on Education (1992) • The constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) • The Education (Pre-Primary, Primary and Post-Primary) Act 2008 • The Business Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) Act (2008) • Education Service Act (2002) • National Curriculum Development Act (2000) • Uganda National Examinations Act (1983) • The Children's Statute (1996) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-service training policy • Early childhood development teacher education and training policy • Primary teacher education and training policy • Secondary teacher education and training policy • Gender in education policy • School health policy • Special needs policy • Guidance and counselling guidelines • Guidelines on terms, conditions and teachers code of conduct • Guidelines on policy, planning, roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the implementation of universal primary education

	YES	NO	Yes	No
Parents/Pupils' guardians	43%	57%	32%	68%
Head teachers	72%	28%	72%	28%
Teachers	56%	44%	66%	34%
School chaplains/Imams	88%	12%	88%	12%
SMC & BOG	35%	65%	38%	62%
Local and District Education Officers	71%	29%	68%	32%
Sub-county chiefs	41%	59%	42%	58%
Community	33%	67%	34%	66%

Findings in Table 1 reveal that 72% of the head teachers and the local and District Educational Officers and 88% of school chaplains/Imams know the educational policy, Acts, regulations and guidelines. The least knowledgeable are parents and school management committee (SMC) members and the school board of governors (SBG), and the general community. The different stakeholders were also asked to give reasons why they either do not know or they seem not to be interested in policies which are supposed to govern education theory and practice in the country and they revealed the following as the salient reasons. Teachers and school administrators (78%) reported that policy inception in Uganda is top-bottom. On the other hand, 89% of the school inspectors reported that many bottom or field education stakeholders, i.e. parents, teachers, head teachers, board of governors and local government

officials, are never consulted in the formulation of education policies and as a result education policies in Uganda are referred to as:

“Their policies or government policy or Ministry of Education and Sports policy”

The statement shows that many of these stakeholders do not view education policies as serving their interest hence in such a case where a policy is not owned by the stakeholders it highly probable that many do not advance or adhere to it.

On the other hand, 93% of the Local and District Education officers reported that there is intentional misinterpretation of government policy. They also cited the UPE policy and feeding of pupils at school. The interviewed stakeholders were asked to suggest some possible remedies and the following were suggested:

To solve this, government should always:

- ▲ consult the different education stakeholders on educational issues
- ▲ set up clear policy implementation frameworks and try to make them known to all relevant stakeholders
- ▲ provide training to all stakeholders on each new policy before the actual implementation
- ▲ endeavour to make regular policy reviews
- ▲ carry out periodic feasibility studies to ascertain the effectiveness of the existing policies

The survey also wanted to establish whether the region has influence on the level of policy and guideline awareness. It was revealed that the stakeholders, namely, parents, SMC members, members of the SBCI, and the general community, in western and central Uganda areas which are more affluent and in proximity to urban areas know most of government policies on education. It was also revealed that performance of pupils and teachers is above average, and the majority of pupils pass either Grade 1 or Grade 2. The survey also revealed that in areas of eastern and northern Uganda, which are mainly post conflict areas, 78% of stakeholders revealed that they had not had a chance to read or access any government policy on education. The above were corroborated by one District Education official in north eastern Uganda who lamented and said:

"We know their good policies but these remain at the Ministry of Education head quarters to beautify their offices. For us in the bush, no one cares about us. We are also not bothered by their policies"

While another said:

"Many of the policies are implemented in areas where government feels it has political support but for us in areas which have been fighting or are seen to fight or not support government nothing is brought to us. No one is bothered whether our children get quality education or rubbish. Actually many of us think that the more our education quality sinks the better for those at the head quarters"

These statements seem to suggest that there is regional educational imbalance in Uganda. This impacts the quality of education in the respective regions of Uganda. This fact is also supported by findings from Furley (1991) and Mamdani (1999), who suggest that colonial and post independence economic and political policies and distortions have had a very big and at times negative impact on the quality of education accessed by most of the people in Uganda.

Teacher and the teaching enterprise

From the available literature on teacher-training in Uganda it is evident that this has been in existence for the last one hundred years. However, the pedagogical approaches used in teacher training and by the teachers are still the orthodoxy approaches, namely, rote reciting and recycling, and use of pure lecture methods which, in turn, are copied by the student teachers in their school and classroom practice (Akankwasa, 2002). Teachers who participated in the research survey were asked to identify the challenges which face quality education as a result of the teaching enterprise. The enterprise was looked at from the training and school practice dimension.

The teacher training dimension

Of the interviewed teachers, 80% revealed the following as the salient challenges in Uganda's teacher training subsector:

- ▲ out dated teacher training curriculum and models
- ▲ inadequate teaching practice by student teachers

Interviewees singled out Makerere University's School of Education where student teachers engage in teaching practice for only 6 weeks. This is also conducted during a time when most urban school children are sitting their mid-term examinations while upcountry school children are involved in games and sports. A senior teacher in one of the upcountry denominational school commenting on teacher training in Uganda said:

“The timing for most student teachers' school practice is inappropriate. There is very little pedagogical practice; many of these student teachers leave school practice when they have only engaged pupils on average in just three weeks”.

While another elderly teacher in an urban government owned school lamented:

“Different teacher training institutions do not in any way motivate student teachers to initiate pedagogical innovations; these in turn cannot do the same while in the field”

A fresh graduate teacher from a public university in Uganda remarked that:

“In spite of the novelty and existence of a wide range of knowledge and pedagogical facilities on the web, many teachers, young and old, lack training in e-learning and e-teaching practice”

The different teachers were asked to suggest some possible remedies and they recommended the following action:

- ▲ e-learning and teaching
- ▲ child rights
- ▲ critical and analytical approaches so as to create a reflective teacher who is empowered and is able to empower others

Challenges in the teaching practice in schools

Many teachers in Uganda are ill prepared for the school challenges in Uganda. These challenges include:

- ▲ poor pay
- ▲ constrained knowledge of ICT (e-learning and e-teaching)
- ▲ inadequate school pedagogical and non pedagogical infrastructures for most schools
- ▲ the inception of UPE, USE and commercialisation in private

schools resulted into large classes, creating an abnormal teacher-pupil ratio of about 1:100

- ▲ indiscipline on the part of teachers which includes child abuse, absenteeism, and unprofessional tendencies such as lack of proper lesson scheming and planning
- ▲ dis-empowered teachers, i.e. teachers who are poor, lazy, undermined in all circles, frustrated and alienated as a result of harsh conditions

Private for Profit (Urban and peri-urban)	This ranges between 200,000 Ug Shillings and 700,000 Ug Shillings	These do not receive any additional emoluments
Private for profit (Rural up country)	This ranges between 150,000 Ug Shillings and 400,000 Ug Shillings	These receive lunch allowance

*The Exchange rate between US dollar and Uganda shilling is
1\$ one US dollar is equivalent to 2400 Uganda shillings

Findings in Table 2 revealed that on average the majority of teachers in Uganda are paid less than 200 US dollars per month.

The social and administrative challenges to Uganda's education

The social challenges will be drawn from the community (parents, the community, and other stakeholders). Different reports from the inspectors of schools, teachers, and school administrators all indicate that the community, specifically the parents, in most cases have abrogated their prime duty and responsibility to educate their children as shown below:

- ▲ It is revealed that many parents, especially in UPE and USE schools, do not provide basic essential needs of their children such as books, pens, shoes, and food. However, children have to compete with other children from the middle class or those whose parents are businessmen and women and elites who can afford boarding school fees. All children sit the same national examinations.
- ▲ Children are not availed any time to do private study especially day students/pupils who are over-burdened with too many

domestic chores before, after and during school holidays.

- ▲ The rampant poverty for most parents and guardians curtails their ability to facilitate provision of meaningful education.
- ▲ There is apparently negative attitude towards education especially among the poor. In most rural parts of Uganda many parents do not see the value of formal schooling, especially of the girl child. Many want their daughters to get married as early as ten years so as to get dowry. This is most prominent in eastern northern and some parts of south western Uganda.

There is need by parents and other stakeholders to revisit their roles. Parents have a duty to facilitate the education of their children and this should involve providing the child with basic necessities for school.

District, local government and school management bodies and school leadership

The key issue raised by 79% of the surveyed SMC and BOG is constrained leadership approaches and lack of proper supervision by the different authorities. This, they argued, has undermined the provision of quality education in Uganda. It should be noted that under normal circumstances the different district, local government and school management bodies are supposed to provide leadership and supervision. On a number of occasions these have been compromised either out of negligence, ignorance or corruption. These in turn cannot offer any useful supervision. On the other hand, in the case of denominational SMC and BOG, it was revealed that even these have drifted from their spiritual oriented educational philosophies. Many of the denominational schools are now run and managed like commercial schools for profit. For example, one Catholic Brother heading a religious Roman Catholic founded school said:

“If we do not manage our school in the same paradigm like secular schools we may run a risk of losing all the students. The key interest of the parents and students are good grades in final national examinations”.

Conclusion

The debate on quality education cannot be concluded in a day. If we are to provide quality education we need to continuously reflect on where we have come from, where we are, and where we want to be. We need to reflect on what really takes place in and out of class by the teacher and learner. If this is not done there is a danger of thinking that we are offering education when it is mere schooling. In reflecting on quality education in Uganda we should also not forget the issue of lopsided development between the South, North, and Central regions of Uganda. If this North-South divide is not sorted out it may be very hard to create educational parity in Uganda and this has dire consequences to the quality of education provided in the entire country. It is also imperative to closely think about the role of a teacher. In the absence of proper and settled families and parenting, schools are the first places in which children receive meaningful behaviour shaping and nurturing. Therefore teachers become the first parents of the youth of the nation. This implies that the early years of the child and the role of the teacher are very crucial for Uganda if we are to have social transformation.

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