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**Policy gaps in Universal Primary Education
that contribute to school dropout in Uganda**

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my lovely mother Mrs. Musoke Mary. I thank you for being a good mother and encouraging me throughout this study period. Specifically, I am grateful to you and to all my sisters for keeping my little son during my absence. May God bless you.

This work is also dedicated to my sweet husband Nathan Onoria and my lovely son Ephraim Omodong Onoria Junior. I love you so much.

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List of Acronyms

CAO	:	Chief Administrative officer
CRC	:	Convention on the Right of Children
DEO	:	District Education Officer
EFA	:	Education for All
EPRC	:	Education Policy Review Commission
FPE	:	Free Primary Education
GER	:	Gross Enrolment Rate
HIV/AIDS:		Human Immune Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
LRA	:	Lords Resistance Army
MDG	:	Millennium Development Goals
MOFPED:		Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development
MOES	:	Ministry of Education and Sports
NRM	:	National Resistance Movement
PEAP	:	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PPA	:	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PSR	:	Poverty Status Report
PTA	:	Parents Teachers Association
SSA	:	Sub Saharan Africa
UBOS	:	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UDF	:	United Democratic Front
UDHS	:	Uganda Demographic and Health Survey
UHRC	:	Uganda Human Right Commission
UIE	:	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNHS	:	Uganda National Household Surveys
UNESCO:		United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNISE	:	Uganda National Institute for Special Education

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UPE: Universal Primary Education

Abstract

Uganda is among the first Sub Saharan African countries that implemented Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme in 1997 with the main goal of providing basic education to all children of school going age. Prior to UPE, primary education was faced with the problem of high dropout and on that basis; it was the expectation of many educational stakeholders that with free education, the problem of school dropout would come to an end. Despite that, many have been disappointed as the rate of school dropout persists to date.

Though in principle, factors such as socio-economical, political and policy lead to school dropout, this study seeks to find out how the policy gaps contribute to school dropout.

Relevance to Development Studies

This study is relevant to the development studies in that the information contained therein will add to the existing knowledge in the field of universal primary education and school dropout.

Keywords

Universal primary education and school dropout

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Education is the driving force behind any strong economy and a prerequisite for social and economic growth. It creates opportunities and provides societies with a better educated and skilled workforce which is necessary for stimulating development (Govender and Steven 2004).

In an effort to provide this, Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy has become popular in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) for achieving Education for All (EFA) since the mid-1990s (Avenstrup et al. 2004).

Despite its recent expansion, most literature reviewed show that previous attempts to achieve UPE in developing countries faced problems in its supply-driven policies such as: unclear mechanisms, and declined quality of education (Mikiko and Keiichi 2008:6). SSA, of which Uganda belongs, is the region with the highest levels of illiteracy in the world and many pupils are denied their fundamental right to education. According to the United Nations, more than 40 million children, almost half of the continent's primary school age pupils are not in school of which about two-thirds of them are female. Fewer than half of Africa's children get a chance to finish primary school (Govender and Steven 2004).

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) global monitoring report released in 2004 which tracks countries' progress on UPE achievement found out that 22 countries in SSA were far from achieving the Education For All (EFA) goals because primary enrolments are low, gender ratios highly unequal, widespread illiteracy, poor educational quality and high school drop outs .

A scenario of low primary school completion in these countries persists despite the effort of universalizing education through UPE. It is for this reason that this study was carried out to investigate policy gaps in the UPE policy/programme both on paper and in practice that contribute to school dropout (Ibid).

1.1. Education System in Uganda

The current Ugandan education structure has been in place since 1963 and came as a result of recommendation made by the Castle Commission. The country's formal education system starts with seven years of primary school (ages 6-12), which is 'supposedly' compulsory and free according to the current Universal Primary Education policy/programme. It is followed by six years of secondary education for ages 13-18, which is non free and non compulsory, though plans are under way to make it universal. This level is succeeded by three to five years of University or tertiary education depending on the profession selected by the individual (Kakuru 2003:1) .

Primary education is central to the whole system and to the life of citizens in general. It enables individuals to acquire literacy, numeric and communications skills, as well as developing cultural, moral and spiritual values (MoES 1999:3). It is for this reason that primary education has been made "free" through UPE programme.

1.1.1. Evolution of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda

Though the purpose and aims for universal primary education are many and varied, they can be generally categorized into three, namely: human rights, equity, and socio-economic development (Mikiko and Keiichi 2008:37).

Formal education was first introduced in Uganda during the colonial period in the 1880s by Voluntary Missionary Organisations. In the early 1920s and 1930s, education was only available to a small group of people mainly children of the aristocrats, clergy and tribal chiefs. With time, the Government's role in education has been expanding to include more people into the system though not everybody can access and succeed in it (Kakuru 2003:3). To address this problem, several commissions were formed by the government to look at the education system in Uganda.

In 1987, the NRM¹ government instituted the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) under the Chairpersonship of Professor W. Senteza Kajubi to look at the state of education in Uganda with terms of reference to recommend policies at all educational levels. After consulting with stakeholders, it recommended primary education to be universalized. In defense of its recommendations, the commission emphasized that “unless every child is enrolled at the right age and does not dropout before completion, it will be impossible to ensure that all citizens have necessary basic education for living a full life” (ibid).

In 1989, the Government appointed a White Paper Committee with the task of examining the EPRC report and identifying the feasible recommendations for implementation as well as making amendments where necessary. After consultations, in 1992, the Government published and accepted the major recommendation of the EPRC on primary education reform modifying only the implementation time frame from 2000 to 2003 (Kakuru 2003). Launching of UPE was being postponed until May 1996 during the first direct presidential elections where President Museveni made it a campaign platform issue in his manifesto and promised free primary education to four children per family if he is elected. On being elected President, in December 1996 he fulfilled his pledge and announced that UPE implementation was to begin in January 1997. This marked the breakthrough in the quest to achieve UPE in Uganda (MoES 1999:9).

But looking at the timing, it can be deduced that though UPE was a good idea, it was hurriedly and politically implemented as the president sought to fulfill his campaign pledges. This gave no time to plan for the implementation of UPE and yet it was seen as the main tool for achieving the economic, social and political objectives of Uganda.

In this context, UPE was perceived as a policy that would guarantee access, equity, quality and relevance of the provided education with the main

¹ National Resistance Army, the ruling party up to today

goal of providing minimum necessary facilities and resources to enable children of school-going age to enter and remain in school until they complete Primary Cycle of Education (MoES 1998:4). Looking at the aim of UPE, it can be assumed that its objectives to some extent were in line with the Farrell's' model of equality of access, survival, output and outcome whereby equality in education requires children to access education system and survive therein so as to be provided with an opportunity for upward social and economic mobility (Farrell 1999:155).

After the introduction of UPE, Government schools experienced a rapid increase in enrolments from 2.8 million in 1997 to 7.6 million in 2004 (MoES 2005). This increase was not proportionately accompanied with increase in other educational facilities like infrastructures and teachers; which to some extent contribute to school dropout.

While some studies indicate that UPE policy effectively improved access to primary education for children from poor families by abolishing fees in public schools (Deigninger 2003.), others reveal that various costs both direct and indirect charged under UPE policy affect negatively the education of the poor children, leading to their dropout (Suzuki 2002). This implies that there is need to continually search for solutions of the challenges that inhibit the UPE policy from achieving its objective of retaining children in school.

1.2 Problem statement

The 1995 constitution of the Republic of Uganda confirms education as a right for all children of school-going age. In addition, in its report of 2004, the Uganda Human Right Commission (UHRC) made it a point that the state has an obligation to establish sufficient schools, hire enough and qualified teachers and provide quality education as stipulated in the international right instruments (Juuko and Kabonesa 2007:11).

Since 1997, the Government of Uganda has been implementing UPE and has increased its spending on it as an effort to meet the demands of primary education. With the introduction of UPE, the government's economic burden

in provision of education was expected to increase as that of parents reduces proportionately. On the other hand, it was expected that both enrollment and retention would increase as the cost of education on the part of parents reduced (Okumu 2008).

High Gross Enrolment Ratio in primary schooling indicates that most or probably all school going children attend primary school at some stage but yet completion rates remain low. Thus despite the government commitment, investment in education and the resultant increase in school enrolment, there still remains high rate of dropout between grades such that not all who enter primary schools complete the full cycle. For example, out of the 2.16 million pupils who enrolled in P1 in 1997 only 1.3 million proceeded to P2; 1.1 million to P3; 0.96 million to P4; 0.83 million to P5; 0.7 million to P6 with barely 0.48 million making it to P7 in 2003 (Nsibambi 2006:11).

The fact that UPE removed only school fees and PTA² charges and left intact other costs such as: exercise books, pens, pencils, uniforms, clothing, lunch, building funds and labor for classroom construction to be met by the parents (MFPED 2002:3), it may explain the low levels of accessibility and survival in UPE schools. Having in mind that poverty levels in Uganda are high, for example between 1992-1997, the poverty rate in the country stood at 56%, therefore, the issue of parents meeting these costs greatly contributes to making education costly and inaccessible to many children from low income brackets (Bitamazire 2005). The policy also seems not to put into consideration the survival strategies for the disadvantaged children like the disabled by providing special conditions that facilitate their enrollment and survival in schools (Ssekamwa 1999).

The concern of all education stakeholders in Uganda is the high incidence of drop out in UPE schools; as Richard Akankwasa, the director of education from the Ministry of Education stressed in his speech; *“The issue of school*

² Parents Teachers Association

dropouts, especially for the girls and irregular attendance, is a major challenge to UPE".³ Such statement implies that there must be something wrong within the UPE policy, either in its design or implementation, and yet it came with the expectations of increasing both school enrollments and survival. It is from this background that in this study, the researcher sets out to investigate the possible policy gaps within UPE policy on paper and in practice that contribute to school dropout.

1.3 Justification of the study

Various reports from the MoES in Uganda confirm that dropout in UPE schools is a big concern in the education sector. This may make achieving education as a human right to be a great challenge in Uganda if nothing is done about it. As noted earlier, education is the driving force behind any strong economy and a prerequisite for social and economic growth as it creates better opportunities for those who go through the full cycle of education as well as providing the societies with a better educated and skilled workforce necessary for stimulating development (Govender and Steven 2004). With such understanding, it becomes necessary for any government to ensure that it curbs the problem of school dropout or else its future generation may risk losing the benefits that would have otherwise accrued from education.

Studies have shown that there is reduced mortality rate among educated mothers, as their ability to make informed decisions increases, need to be integrated into the globalized world, reduce poverty through adoption of modern technology and being responsible citizens; all require educated people. And if the trend of the UPE school dropout in Uganda remains as it is today, the future generation is susceptible to dangers associated with lack of education. To avoid that, continuous studies are necessary so as to find out the possible problems associated with the UPE policy and how they can be curbed so as to terminate the incidence of school dropout (MFPED 2002).

³ New vision of Monday18/02/08

While much has been written on UPE programme in Uganda, this paper focuses on finding out the policy gaps in UPE policy both on paper and in practice that contribute to school dropout. The findings of this study will also add value to the existing knowledge on UPE policy and thus contribute to the overall improvement of education system in Uganda.

1.4 Research objective

The main objective of this study is to assess the gaps in UPE policy that contribute to school dropout in Uganda.

1.4.1 Research Questions

The questions of this study are:

-What are the underlying policy gaps in the UPE policy on paper that contribute to primary school dropout in Uganda?

-What are the underlying gaps in the UPE policy in practice that contribute to primary school dropout in Uganda?

1.5 Research Methodology

This study is basically exploratory and is based on secondary data collected from the UPE policy documents, different reports from the Ministry of Education and Sports and other relevant literature available on UPE and primary school dropout in Uganda.

In order to assess the gaps in UPE policy, the researcher consulted and reviewed various documents such as Government policy papers, empirical studies conducted in this field, journals, internet sources and other unpublished reports. These documents were critically reviewed and supportive evidence, contradictions and assumptions identified assisted the researcher in drawing claims, conclusion and recommendations regarding the policy.

1.6 Scope of the study

This paper is restricted to identifying the gaps in the UPE policy both on paper and in practice and how they contribute to school dropout in Uganda.

1.7 Organisation of the Paper

This paper comprises of five chapters. In the first chapter, the researcher provides a brief background of the study with problem statement, the objective of the study and the research methodology. In the second chapter, she reviews different literature on school dropout and introduces the analytical framework by which the policy of UPE was analysed. In the third chapter, the researcher analyses the policy on paper and its contribution to school dropout, while in fourth chapter she discusses the gaps of UPE in practice and their contribution to school dropout in Uganda. In the last chapter, the researcher presents a summary of findings, draws the conclusion and the recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the researcher seeks to explain the different concepts used in the study as well as reviewing available literature in an effort to highlight possible gaps in the UPE policy that contribute to school dropout in UPE schools. The researcher highlights how different studies have pointed to UPE policy gaps as a factor that contributes to school dropout. Using the right based approach and Farrell's framework of analysis, the researcher shows how UPE is debated as either a right or a privilege in the context of Uganda.

2.2 Enrolment and school drop out

In the Ugandan context, enrollment refers to the process of registering children into the school register and it is done at the beginning of every academic calendar where parents are required to take to school the children who have attained school going age. Upon registration, a track record of their physical presence and learning in class is monitored twice daily by a class teacher by marking their presence. In a situation where attendance fluctuates, it amounts to absenteeism but if absenteeism is spread for a period longer than one year; the child is then considered having dropped out of school in that year.

School dropout is the difference between the number of pupils/students enrolled at the beginning of the year and the number of those who remained at the end of the year (MGLSD and Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2002:12)⁴. In the context of Uganda, dropout is considered to happen whenever student/pupil fall out of the school system before completing primary seven which is the full

⁴ Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development

education cycle. Both school and non school factors contribute to this scenario.

According to a joint (UIS)⁵/UNICEF global estimate, 115 million school-age children are out of school. This number is equivalent to 18 per cent or almost one in five of the children worldwide in this age group. Still there are many children who never enter primary school, more who will enter late (and over-age), and others will enter and drop out before completing full cycle of primary schooling regardless of UPE existence. This is as a result of factors such as policy problems, lack of access to schools, poor quality education, high schooling costs and low returns to education among others which gang up to push children out of UPE schools (MFPED 2002).

In developed countries where education is universal and compulsory, an analysis on the determinants of school drop-out done by (Cardoso and Dorte 2006:3) indicated that dropping out of UPE schools is not seen as a policy problem. It is seen as resulting from factors such as; drug use, alcohol consumption, and parents' psychiatric disorders, controlling for possible confounding factors such as socio-economic status of the family, gender, race, and age of the child. In the developing countries much of dropout cases and education failures are traced both within and outside the education policy and this informs the choice of this study to look at policy related factors that contribute to school dropout.

In most developing countries, school dropout or low survival in schools has been a subject of interest to many academicians, researchers, and policy makers for a long time. Although the findings of various studies on school dropout differ depending on the different country specific situations, factors such as; rural- urban divide, gender bias, organization and governance of the education policies, civil conflicts and war, poverty/vulnerability- costs, impact of HIV/AIDS and distance to school appear to be the most common elements that lead to primary school dropout in all studies (MFPED 2002).

⁵ UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Though many authors have emphasized that poverty is the main cause of school dropout in the developing countries, UPE programme seems to have left this concern out due to its cost sharing factor. This is evidenced by (Caillods et al. 2006:15) that in several countries, UPE fees and charges still exist either legally or illegally. They include tuition fees, examination fees, purchase of uniforms and textbooks, game fees, contribution to school repairs, school guards, book keeping, teacher resource centres, food, among others, of which they are borne by parents, making it difficult for poor children to access education and survive the full cycle.

It is widely recognized that the expansion of primary education through UPE has significantly deteriorated the quality of education .UPE stakeholders have noted that the progress made in enrollments has hampered progress in other areas of EFA goals especially the low quality of education which is depicted in poor scores in school exams of which leads to many pupils being discouraged and end up dropping out of UPE school (Murphy 2003:9).

Since this study focused on Uganda, most of the documents reviewed relate to UPE policy in Uganda. According to the Ugandan Poverty Status Report (UPSR 2005), high dropout from UPE schools continues to pose a challenge to successful implementation of the policy as evidenced in the UNHS report of 2005-2006 which found that many children do not complete primary school despite the existence of UPE.

Primary School Completion in Uganda 2000-2006 ('000)

Currently attending	Attending P1 in 2000			Attending P7 in 2006			Completion rates %	Dropout rate %
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total		
Region	M	F	Total	M	F	Total		
Kampala	53	39	92	16	15	31	33.7	66.3
Central	251	226	477	80	85	165	34.6	65.4
Eastern	177	187	364	94	74	168	46	54
Northern	176	203	379	90	47	137	36	64
Western	251	244	496	98	86	184	37	63
Uganda	900	907	1,807	378	307	685	38	62

Table 1: Adopted from(Okaja 2007:39)

From the above table, it is evident that all regions in Uganda experienced over 54% dropout, with Kampala registering a record 66.3% dropout rate and national wide dropout rate resting at 62%. This means that on average, only 38% of all the pupils who enrolled during this period survived the full cycle of education.

2.3 Why dropout in Uganda?

Though there is no single factor that can explain why children drop out of UPE schools in Uganda; socio-economic, gender based and policy factors gang up altogether to push children out of school.

2.3.1 Socio-economic factors

Socio-economic factors take into consideration social beliefs and economic reasons for dropout. A study conducted by (Nakanyike et al. 2002:10), in different regions of Uganda found that among others; lack of school requirements contributed to (32.7%); loss of parents (18.4%) and parents' inability to provide children with school requirements (14.3%) with the remaining 34.6% of other minor causes as indicated in the table below.

Causes of school dropout from the perspective of the children who dropped out by 2002

Region	Central%	West%	North%	East%	Total%
Causes					
Lack of school requirement	14.3	30.8	31.3	46.2	32.7
Loss of parents	14.3	30.8	18.8	7.7	18.4
Parents inability to provide school requirements	28.6	15.4	6.3	15.4	14.3
Others	14.3	15.4	12.5		10.2
Early pregnancy			6.3	15.4	6.1
Chronic illness	28.6			7.7	6.1
Poor performance in class		7.7	6.3	7.7	6.1
Business diverting their attention			6.3		2.0
Caring for sick relatives			6.3		2.0
Long distance			6.3		2.0

Table 2: adopted from Nakanyike et al., 2002:24.

From the above table, lack of school requirement which is basically an economic problem accounts for the highest cause of dropout (32.7%) in UPE schools followed by loss of parents and parents inability to pay, all of which have social and economic dimension.

In the study of child poverty in different parts of Uganda by (Bukokhe 2002), the causes of school dropout were found to be similar to those highlighted by (Nakanyike et al. 2002), though the former emphasizes lack of investment in education particularly by illiterate parents who do not value education as well as unofficial charges in UPE schools imposed on poor parents to be the major reasons for dropping out of primary schools.

According to (Bategeka 2005:7), pupils abandon school for different reasons but the most common ones are; lack of interest (46%); family responsibilities(15%);sickness(12%);employment(4%);marriage(4%);school fees(3%);pregnancy(2%);dismissal (1%) and others (13%). In his study, lack of interest ranked the highest cause of dropout. Though the author does not show why many children lack interest in schools, this revelation puzzled, incited and pushed the researcher to find out whether there exists gaps in the UPE policy that could be playing a role in pushing children out of UPE schools, since children do not just lose interest in education without any reason in this era of free education for all and the knowledge on value of education and especially that it is used as antipoverty tool.

The Second Report of Participatory Poverty Assessment (MFPED 2002) gives broad information about causes of dropout in UPE schools; which it attributes to poor implementation of UPE policy. The listed factors include;

(I) Long distances from School, children have to wake up very early in order to arrive at school on time and yet lunch at school is not given;

(II) High costs being met by parents as the government does not provide all necessary school requirements such as: school uniforms, scholastic materials, lunch at school, top-up of teachers' salaries who are not on pay-roll, building funds and others;

(III) Negative parental attitudes towards UPE programme as it is assumed to be for the poor and of poor quality. And for that reason, UPE is termed as “bona bakone” meaning “let all fail”.

Looking at this situation critically, one can say that these are some of the gaps in the UPE policy that push disadvantaged children out of school as they are unable to meet all the costs associated with UPE and yet the output gained is of poor quality.

In the 2001 report of the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) on school dropout, it was pointed out that the main causes of dropout are; monetary cost of schooling; need for children to do work in support of the household of which is more common for female than male children; illness or disability; failure to pass examinations; poor school quality; lack of free secondary schools; inability to find jobs by school graduates; pregnancy or marriage related factors for girls especially. Among these causes, failure to pass well, poor school quality and lack of free secondary education can be directly attributed to failure of UPE policy to address these issues at hand and poor planning of UPE; while monetary cost, need for children to work in support of their household could have been indirectly addressed if UPE took into account the need to meet the costs of UPE for children from poor socio- economical backgrounds.

2.3.2 Gender based dropout

The recent studies carried out on school dropout with gender perspective have come up with different ideas. (Kakuru 2003:10) argues that the aggregate rates of drop out in all government-aided schools for girls and boys are almost equal whereby the total number of male dropouts in 2001 was 50.6%, while that of females was 49.4%. As much as UPE policy focuses on promoting gender parity in enrolment, retention, and performance in primary education; it lacks gender specific policies like back to school after pregnancy in key areas. For example, in Uganda adolescent pregnancy rate stands at 35% of all girls who

drop out of school and this is something that needs to be rectified if equality of survival is to be attained in UPE schools (Bitamazire 2005).

It would be worthwhile to note that though boys and girls may experience similar factors, they are affected differently and some factors like teenage pregnancy affect girls more than boys. In the practice of UPE, some factors have demonstrated to be more unfavorable to girls than boys leading to higher number of girls dropping out than boys which can be attributed to the fact that UPE policy does not take into consideration specific needs of girls such as availing hygienic facilities in schools. This may be the reason why survival of girls in these schools is lower than that of boys though under similar conditions (Kakuru 2003).

Sexual abuse/ harassment, early marriage coupled with prioritizing boys over girls also are still a challenge to the education of girls, a factor that leads to their dropout in larger numbers than boys (Atekyereza 2001:117). Though this reason is not part of the policy, but the researcher believes that if parents were well sensitized during the implementation of UPE on the importance of educating both girls and boys, such incidence would have been minimized.

2.3.3. Policy based factors

Though in this study, the researcher recognizes the existence of various factors that contribute to school dropout; its main focus is on the UPE policy gaps that contribute to school dropout. For example, according to (Nakanyike et al. 2002:60), dropout in UPE schools is to a certain extent attributed to the parents, community and schools which focus more on increasing the enrollment in schools while neglecting the efforts to retain them therein. This makes it to seem as though the aim of UPE in Uganda is to have big numbers enrolled in schools without minding on their completion. It is this concern that captured the researcher's interest in the area of UPE policy gaps and their contribution to school dropout since the reality on ground shows low completion rate which contradicts with the main goal UPE programme.

2.4 UPE and Quality Measurement

According to (Colclough 1993) UPE is defined as “*the circumstance of having a primary Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 100% or more*”. In the Ugandan context, UPE refers to the provision of basic education to all children (i.e. having them enrolled and complete the whole cycle). It goes further than the above definition of ensuring 100% enrollment and addresses the issue of completing the full course of primary education of all who enroll regardless of their status ((MoES 1998:2).

Concerning quality measurement, there are disparities in the measurement of quality of UPE. Much as quality of education is a factor considered to retain children in school, there are yet no agreements on how best it can be measured. According to the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (2005:7), education quality can be monitored through assessment of school inputs, processes and outcomes. (Guarcello et al. 2006:17) have made an analysis of school quality indicators based on three areas i.e. teachers, classroom and school environment by showing how they play a part towards the quality of education. For example, the quality of teacher reflects what s/he produces to the pupils. Guarcello et al. further acknowledges how the quality of education affects the survival rate of children in school. They point out that once the pupil teacher ratio increases, the possibility of school dropout increases due to low quality produced. This idea is being used in this study in exploring the kind of education quality given under UPE and whether it plays part in school dropout.

2.4.1 Universalizing primary education in Uganda

In 1997, Uganda introduced UPE policy with the main goal of universalizing education by providing the minimum necessary facilities and resources to enable all children of school going age acquire basic education (MoES 1998). UPE implementation led to the abolition of school fees and Parents teachers

Association (PTA) charges. Though the government of Uganda has demonstrated commitment to UPE through increasing finance to the education sector as a way of universalizing education (Bategeka and Okurut 2006), parents are required to provide school materials such as exercise books, pens, pencils, building funds and uniforms which make children from poor background dropout before completing the whole primary cycle (Kakuru 2006:18).

As a way of universalizing education through UPE, all children i.e. the disabled, the orphans, girls and boys were encouraged to join the education system (UNISE and KISE 2000). However it appears that there lacks a policy to address specific needs for children with disabilities as many of them still continue to drop out despite the effort made by the Government to universalize education through UPE programme (Ssekamwa 1999).

In an effort to make education accessible to all, the Government of Uganda established more schools, new teachers were employed and some instructional materials were distributed to these schools (Mikiko and Keiichi 2008:102). This was done to respond to high enrollment which came up after the introduction of UPE. But the available information shows that the available schools, teachers, scholastic materials are inadequate for the number of pupils which also contributes to the existing problem of school dropout (Tomasevski 1999).

2.4.2 UPE in Uganda in relation to some African UPE contexts

In recent times, most researchers have found some uniformity of UPE policy that prevail in the SSA countries and suggested that there should be studies to examine how this policy is responding to the capacity and needs of each country (Mikiko and Keiichi 2008:6). It is on this basis that the researcher finds it necessary to examine how UPE in Uganda compares with the same policy in countries like Kenya and Malawi.

Launching UPE in Uganda, like in these two countries, was politically motivated. While these governments had tossed the idea of universalizing

primary education for years, but no action was taken until UPE appeared in the campaign platforms that it was hurriedly implemented so as to please the electorate. For example in Kenya the idea of UPE started in the early 1950s but it was during 2002 general elections that the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) party put it in its election manifesto. Following its victory, on January 6, 2003 the Minister of Education launched Free Primary Education (FPE) to fulfill the election pledge (Ibid:41- 44). The same applies in Malawi as UPE had been on the political agenda since 1960s before Malawi's independence, but it was actively pursued in 1994 when the United Democratic Front (UDF) government came into power following the first democratic elections and it embarked on an ambitious programme of educational reform and immediately declared free primary education (Kadzamira 2003).

In these countries generally, it is clear that political considerations superseded the need for sound analysis and assessment of needs, leading to inadequate preparation, consultation, planning, budgeting and a smooth implementation. Regarding the objective of the policy, in all these countries, the medium term expected outcomes was to reduce absenteeism, increase net enrolment and reduce school dropout (Mikiko and Keiichi 2008:66).

In these countries, the governments and development partners were to meet some of the cost of basic teaching and learning materials, and curricula activities leaving other costs like for school uniforms to be met by parents which meant that the poorest are unable to receive the full benefits from education; a reason that may reduce their survival in schools (Kadzamira 2003:502).

In all these countries there was little time to negotiate with all education stakeholders. Malawi held a two-day National Policy Symposium and launched a mass media campaign to mobilize the public; Uganda used radio spots to communicate with the public which shows insufficient consultation and especially to the parents who have to provide scholastic materials to their children. However, in Kenya, a stakeholder forum was created to build strong ownership and may be, that is why parents in Kenya seem to have been sensitized a lot towards providing education materials to their children and

they have gone a step ahead to organize themselves into harambee (self help) functions for building classes and providing school uniforms which are not covered by the Government (Mikiko and Keiichi 2008:57). More so, in Kenya, feeding programs are provided in arid and semi-arid areas which is different from Uganda whereby children dropout due to hunger since they have to pay for their lunch (Avenstrup et al. 2004).

While in Uganda, UPE abolished only school fees and left other costs to be met by the parents, Malawi's UPE policy abolished all forms of fees, made school uniforms optional and the government pays for facilities, teachers, textbooks, and materials which increases survival of children in schools (ibid). The researcher finds it necessary to stress that some actions taken in these countries like making uniforms non compulsory, as it is done in Malawi, it can be adopted in Uganda, an aspect that may increase the survival rate of some children in schools.

2.7 Analytical Framework

This study uses the right based approach (RBA) as developed by UNECSO to analyse UPE policy on paper and in practice in relation to school dropout in Uganda. Under this approach, the state has the responsibility of making education free, compulsory, affordable, child friendly, qualitative and responsive to different needs. RBA is coupled with Farrell's Model which views *"schooling as a long-term process in which children may be sorted at many different points and in several different ways [operating] as a selective social screening mechanism"* ((Farrell 1999:155) . This model is preferred over others as it takes into account the internal efficiency of UPE policy by analyzing its equality of access, survival, output and outcome. It also has the ability to capture the unique objectives and situations which should prevail if UPE policy is to address the holistic needs of school children underlying in RBA. The four dimensions of the model examines *"at what point, to what degree, and how are children of each social groups screen out or kept in"* (ibid)?

2.7.1 Equality of access

This criterion assesses the probability of children from different social groups getting into the school system (Farrell 1999:155). It examines whether the policy on paper and in practice provides the access of education to all children regardless of their backgrounds (the poor, the girls, the disabled, those in the rural, in war zones and the disadvantaged). Previously, UPE policy had a realistic tendency towards universality. As noted earlier, UPE was designed with the objective of making basic education accessible to all children of school going age but due to the Government's commitment to provide education to only four children per family; it was not entirely accessible to all⁶. But in 2002, the Government changed the commitment of four children per family and allowed all pupils to access education under the UPE Programme which enabled children who had dropped out of primary education to re-enter school again (Avenstrup et al. 2004).

2.7.2 Equality of survival

This assesses the probability of children from various social groupings staying in the school system from the time of enrollment up to Completion level (Farrell 1999:155). In the context of Uganda; it examines the probability of completion from primary one to seven. The fact that before UPE, education system was constrained by school dropout due to both supply (Policies, funding and institutional) and demand (Household resources, labour market opportunities, socio-cultural/religious) factors, this assesses whether UPE on paper and practice covers the leading factors that used to make children dropout out or whether it has measures in place to ensure dropping back for those who hardly survive the whole primary cycle.

⁶ www.eenet.org.uk, 2003-11-21

2.7.3 Equality of output

This examines the probability of children from various social grouping in different places learning the same things at the same level and getting the same quality /standards of education (Farrell 1999:155). The study uses this framework to investigate whether UPE policy in Uganda provides to all children the same education quality and skills regardless of their physical, socio and economic background. With UPE in Uganda, to ensure affordable and quality education, it is expected that, the same quality of education grant, instructional materials and teachers salaries are provided to all schools whether in the rural, urban and war zones.

2.7.4 Equality of outcome

According to Farrell, the solution lays in extending the task of the state to include not only access and survival in school but also “ensuring that all children, regardless of their social, economic, physical, biological status or origin, have an equal ability to benefit from the educational opportunity provided, in terms of what they learn and how they can use that learning in later life, particularly in the labor market” (Farrell 1999:155). In Ugandan case, this study examines the extent to which all who survives the full primary school cycle gain access to secondary education and later access job market.

2.8 Right to education

“The right to education in developing countries receives its inspiration and platform from the 1948 United Nations General Assembly, which adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 26 of the declaration states that: *“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory...”* Among other frameworks where education has been fronted as a right are; the International Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and the Dakar Framework for

Action adopted in 2000. In these frameworks, expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children is one important commitment made with an emphasis on girls' education as one of the overriding features.

Article 28 of the (CRC) 1989 Convention on the Right of Children states *“States parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall in particular (a) make primary education compulsory and available free for all;(b) take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of dropout rates”*.

As a signatory of CRC in 1990, the Government of Uganda committed itself to ensure the provision of education through UPE. The 1995 constitution of the Republic of Uganda established education as a right to all and the state introduced UPE and increased its expenditure on it as a way to meet the demands of primary education. Though UPE provision is in place, what is still troubling is the problem of survival in schools as many children continue to drop out.

2.8.1 Right Based Approach (RBA) and UPE in Uganda

According to Theis (2004), RBA ensures that all children receive good quality basic education. Quality education is child centered, it prepares him/her for the challenge that s/he may face in life and helps every child reach his/her full potential. Quality education is not limited to learning only but also looks at the child's health, nutritional status, wellbeing, safety and protection from abuse and violence. It concerns also with the child's daily environment on what happens to children before and after school (Theis 2004:28).

RBA recognizes children as subjects of right .As right holders; children are entitled to demand the state to meet its obligations of respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to education of all. By law, UPE is expected to be universal, free, accessible , equity/ inclusive education, gender sensitive, supportive, nurturing, safe and healthy, effective as well as relevant and participative (Theis 2004:30). In the case of Uganda, UPE policy on paper is

designed to be accessible, affordable and universal to all children. However, due to government's failure to remove costs attached to UPE, in reality, it has turned to be a privilege for those who are above the constraining social, cultural and economic traps as well as those who can afford to pay its hidden costs. Having in mind that poverty levels in Uganda are high, for example between 1992-1997, the poverty rate was estimated to be 56% (MFPED 2002), the issue of parents meeting these costs greatly contributes to making education costly and lowers the survival of children in schools once they access education (Bitamazire 2005).

- **Free access and compulsory education**

For the UPE to be accessible, education has to be free, compulsory, affordable and accessible to all children of school going age (Theis 2004:28). But in reality it is not accessible to all. First and foremost, at its initiation in 1997, the government committed to make it free to only four children per family and yet some families had more than four children of school going age. To some extent this was an outright exclusion of children from large families though this was corrected in 2002 when UPE was made free to all children (Aventrup et al 2004).

- **Equal and inclusive education**

This criterion ensures that every child acquires equal opportunity to education irrespective of his/her economic, social, religion, opinion, disability and HIV status. This respects diversity and it does not exclude any child (Theis 2004:28). It is true UPE on paper provides equal and affordable quality education to all school children; and to ensure that, both rural and urban schools are provided with similar resources by the Government. But the reality shows that most schools are not equipped to match the big numbers of children enrolled in schools. The most affected schools are those in rural areas where the majority of people depend on agriculture for livelihood. Therefore this confirms why

most children who dropouts come from the rural and poor backgrounds (UNISE and KISE 2000).

- **Gender sensitivity**

Education is a right for all children as both girls and boys are entitled to get equal treatment in enrollment, learning, retention in schools and all opportunities accruing from education. Facilities such as textbooks, curricula and the teaching process should assist children socialize in a non violent environment and respect each other's right, dignity, diversity and equity (Theis 2004:30). While it is true that UPE policy emphasises equal opportunity for education to all, it is however noticeable that girls enjoy basic education much less than boys and their dropping out rate is higher than that of boys. Boys seem to have more advantages than girls in one way or the other. This study therefore seeks to find out the possible policy gaps in the UPE policy that contribute this scenario of having less girls surviving in the education system as compared to boys.

- **Effective and relevant learning**

Education's content and teaching method should be relevant and responsive to different circumstances and needs of children. Teaching techniques, learning methods and materials need to be child centered and appropriate for children. In addition, teacher's capacity, morale, commitment, status, income and recognition to child right should be ensured (Theis 2004:28). Though UPE on paper recommends this, there is still a problem of availing adequate resources to all schools as noted by (Tomasevski 1999) that lack of scholastic and instructional materials in UPE schools especially in rural areas continue to dominate reasons for school dropout as the opposite is true that children in urban areas seem to be more privileged than those in rural areas since they can easily access schools with better facilities than their counterparts in the rural .

- **Supportive, nurturing, safe and health learning environment**

Education as a right should guarantee safety and security to children. They should be protected from corporal punishment, abuse and any other sort of harassment in order to have full support to complete their education. Encouraging and supportive school environment should be promoted so as to protect children's physical, psychological and their well being. Adequate water and sanitation facilities should be sufficient since they are paramount in persuading children to complete school (Theis 2004:28). With regard to Uganda, this has been more of a myth than a reality because UPE schools are associated with threats such as: hunger, corporal punishments, violence and insecurity of which they are more pronounced in war areas (i.e. Gulu and Bundibugyo). As a result, children dropout of school since their security is not guaranteed (Tomasevski 1999).

- **Participation**

With education as a right, child- friendly environment has to be promoted and for this to happen, there is need to involve children, parents and teachers in curriculum development, choice of learning contents, selection of learning materials, education reforms and school management (Theis 2004:28-30). According to Theis (2004), participation in the development of school curriculum is the children's right. But in Uganda, UPE policy does not provide any room for children's participation as they are expected to attend school and follow curriculums developed by professionals. The same also applies to participation of their parents in the planning and designing curriculums for UPE schools. It is very possible that most parents and children do not know the meaning of curriculum leave alone its content. Therefore, these children are groomed and forced to swallow all that is provided in the name of education whether good or bad. Participation in designing of school

curriculum remains a privilege to the rich children who attend private schools, leaving those in UPE schools to study whatever available to them⁷.

2.9 Conclusion

From the literature reviewed, it can be derived that to some degree, all the factors that lead to school dropout are interrelated. The major causes includes: high costs charged in schools, unfriendly school environment, marriage and early pregnancy for girls especially. With the introduction of UPE in 1997, the expectation was that UPE would bring to an end the problem of school dropout in primary education. To the disappointment of many, this was never the case as dropout in UPE schools persists amidst this effort. The following chapter sets out to examine the policy of UPE as it is on the paper in order to assess if there exists policy gaps that contribute to the incidence of school dropout.

⁷ (UPE Newsletter 2001).

CHAPTER THREE

UPE POLICY ON PAPER AND DROPOUT

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher looks at the policy of UPE on paper and analyses it against Farrell's model of equality of access, survival, output and outcome in the context of Uganda in order to find out possible gaps that contribute to school dropout. The researcher argues that if there no gaps in the UPE design, dropout in UPE schools would have been checked as soon as the policy was implemented and provision of basic education to all children would have become a reality. With regard to this, the researcher sets out to find out the existing gaps in the policy on paper and the degree of their contributions to school dropout.

The main goal of UPE is to provide minimum necessary facilities and resources to enable children of school going age to enter and complete the whole primary Cycle(MoES 1998:2). Through UPE, access, equity, quality and relevant education is to be provided by the Government (ibid). This content and the goal of UPE seems narrow in that it does not guarantee equality of output as it does not show how pupils from different backgrounds and regions will be able to achieve the same level of output (learning) as well as leaving out the component of outcome by leaving out the essence of joining secondary education thereafter. In reality, this has a negative effect on UPE implementation and in solving the problem of school dropout.

Although UPE has a connotation of universality, its origin and objectives are linked to political motives as it was introduced in January 1997, following a political commitment of 1996 by President Museveni that the Government would meet the cost of primary education of four children per family. This commitment was extended in 2002 to allow all children to access primary education (Bategeka and Okurut 2006:1). It can be mentioned that the government was not yet ready to implement the policy at such a time because

there were no scholastic materials in place and all UPE stakeholders were not aware on what responsibilities to fulfill. Therefore, UPE was launched to influence the direction of the national election which was in place that time (Churchill 2007:39).

3.1 UPE policy objectives

The main objectives of Universal Primary Education are as follows;

- (I) To establish, provide and maintain quality education as the basis for promoting the necessary human resources development;
- (II) Transforming society in a fundamental and positive way;
- (III) Providing the minimum necessary facilities and resources to enable every child to enter and complete the whole Primary Cycle
- (IV) Making basic education accessible to the learner and relevant to his/her needs so as to meet national goals;
- (V) Making education equitable in order to eliminate disparities and inequalities;
- (VI) Ensuring that education is affordable by majority of Ugandans;
- (VII) Meeting the objective of poverty eradication illiteracy while equipping every individual with the basic skills and knowledge with which to exploit the environment for both self and national development (MoES 1999:10).

While looking at the above objectives in relation to Farrell's model, at the face value, one can say that UPE on paper meets all the criteria of equality of access, survival, output and outcome. But a closer look at them reveals deep gaps that are impended in the policy design that contribute to school dropout. For example though objective (ii and vii), the policy promises to transform the society in fundamental and positive way, eradicate poverty and illiteracy as a way of ensuring equality of output and outcome respectively. However, it does not show how this can be possible with access to primary school alone, a level that does not guarantee its graduates a job in the market. The same can be said regarding the policy inability to provide tangible guidelines on how survival is

to be guaranteed as in the case of Canada where drop back is factored into their UPE policy (Farrell 1999).

3.1.1 Implementation strategies of UPE

In order to achieve the set goals and objectives, it was planned that UPE was to be funded jointly by international development partners (i.e. funding agencies, Government of Uganda and the community) and to be implemented by the local governments. The plan of funding UPE as structured on paper seems problematic as it may be a contributor to failure in its implementation as depending on foreign funds which come with strings attached are likely to lead to shortages of funds in critical sectors like primary education. On the other hand, the conditions accompanying these funds are rarely in line with local needs and in most cases; they end up meeting the needs of the donors other than those of the pupils.

The community funding also seems problematic because the policy of UPE is considered political since it was used as a campaign platform for 1996 presidential elections and those in the opposition side look at UPE as a government project thereby perceiving community funding as giving support to the ruling government and retain it in power.

UPE package has five components which were meant to be provided by the Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Education and Sports. They include;

- (I) Infrastructure provision component which was to expand physical facilities in form of classroom, latrines and teachers' houses to accommodate increased enrolments,
- (II) Provision of capitation grants where the Government undertook to pay tuition fees for four children per family at the rate of Ug.shs.5, 000= per pupil per annum for classes P1 – P3 and Ug.shs.8, 100= per child of P.4 – P.7.thereby relieving parents of this burden;

- (III) Provision of qualified and adequate teachers for effective implementation of education programme;
- (IV) Primary school curriculum review in order to make the UPE programme relevant to the needs of the children. The review was further aimed at equipping every individual with basic skills such as functional literacy and numeric skills, effective communication skills in local languages, appreciation of diversity in cultural practices, traditions and social organizations as well as acceptance of a variety of social beliefs and values;
- (V) Furthermore, Government undertook the responsibility to provide increased quantities of instructional materials like textbooks with a view to promoting quality education and equity through improved access and usage of scholastic materials (Nsibambi 2006:112).

Besides the central Government, local authorities and school management committees are expected to participate in the policy Implementation.

The Local authorities: Under the leadership of the Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) who are deputized by Sub-county chiefs, are responsible for ensuring that all UPE funds released to them from the MoES reach schools and are spent for the intended purposes. UPE funds are conditional grants, over which district authorities have little power of reallocation to other uses. The CAOs who are government officers are responsible for ensuring prompt payment of UPE grants to schools, proper accountability of UPE grants, formulation of the education budget and its successful fulfillment as well as adequate briefing of District Councils on the implementation of UPE (Bategeka and Okurut 2006:2).

The fact that the policy does not specify the minimum requirements for CAOs and sub-county chiefs, most of them are not trained in education field and child oriented programs. To some extent, this does not go well with

delivery of UPE programme which is likely to contribute to the school dropout.

School management committees: These are statutory organs at the school level representing the government. They give overall direction to the operation of the school, ensure that schools have development plans, approve and manage school budgets, monitor school finances, and ensure transparency in use of UPE funds with Head-teachers reporting to the District Education Officers (DEOs) who work closely with the school management committees in running UPE schools. Though the criterion under which these committees are formed is not clearly, they are accountable for all money disbursed to schools and management of the school properties. Therefore, this leaves a lot of doubt to how sufficient they carry out such hard task to ensure effective UPE implementation (Bategeka and Okurut 2006:2).

3.1.2 UPE intended services /packages

Previously, UPE policy had a realistic tendency towards universality. As noted earlier, it was designed with the objective of making basic education accessible to all children. However, the policy does not make education entirely free as only school fees and PTA⁸ charges were removed leaving other costs of education such: exercise books, pens, pencils, uniforms, clothing, lunch, building funds and labor for classroom construction to be borne by the parents.

Having in mind that poverty levels in Uganda are high, for example, between 1992-1997, the poverty rate was estimated to be 56% (MFPED 2002:3), therefore, the issue of parents meeting these costs greatly contributes to making education costly, inaccessible and lowers the rate of survival in schools to the poor (Bitamazire 2005).

⁸ Parents Teachers Association

Before the introduction of UPE, education system was constrained with the problem of school dropout due to both supply (policies, funding and institutional) and demand (household resources, labour market opportunities and socio-cultural/religious) factors. Having known this situation before and yet the policy on paper did not put into consideration the survival strategies for the disadvantaged children like the disabled by providing special facilities for them but rather left them to enroll them into the main stream without special teachers and facilities to make them fit into the system. This problem has negatively affected the survival of these children in schools (Ssekamwa 1999).

UPE has intentions of making good quality education affordable to all. To achieve this, the same amount of education grant, instructional materials and teachers salaries are provided to all schools regardless of their locations. Since UPE policy on paper gives the same amount and treatment to all areas, it takes the whole Uganda to be homogenous and ignores its diversities such as rural/urban, poor/rich, girls/ boy, war and non-war zones a factor that hinders equity of output which contributes to the existence of school dropout (MFPED 2002).

If UPE programme was to ensure high survival rate in schools as well equality of outcome; free secondary education would have been included as one of its objectives. Prior to UPE, the problem of transition from primary to secondary⁹ school was one of the reasons why many children dropped from school. By UPE not making secondary school free, this loophole still remains and contributes to dropout especially to the children of poor backgrounds who have no hope of joining secondary education due to the exorbitant fees charged.

The introduction of UPE policy had specific provisions to address gender and other inequities that existed earlier on. For example, when UPE was still restricted to four children per family, if the family had female children, at least

⁹ Secondary education was and still is expensive yet it is a stage where one acquires the skills that can allow him/her to work in the lowest position of the public sector as a cleaner.

two had to be girls. According to (Bategeka and Okurut 2006:8), much as UPE policy focuses on promoting gender parity in enrolment, retention, and performance in primary education; it lacks gender specific policies in key areas. According to Farrell's model, the policy on paper does not guarantee equality of survival in that though girls and boys may start school with equal chances, when girls reach puberty stage, they are likely to dropout in larger number than boys due to their biological needs which are not catered for by UPE. For example, in Uganda, adolescent pregnancy rate remains high whereby thirty-five percent of girls are either pregnant or have given birth by the age of 17. This is a major problem that contributes to the girls' dropping out of school. Since this problem existed prior to UPE and UPE on paper did not rectify it, leaving it out reflects the greatest policy gap in the area of gender that makes girls dropout in higher numbers than boys (Kakuru 2003).

On the hygienic front, the policy on paper appears to be gender blind in that it does not mention any strategy of providing separate facilities such toilets and changing rooms for girls. This makes the available ones to be shared between boys and girls. The implication is that, specific needs of girls especially during their monthly periods are not adequately catered for by the policy which is another contributing factor to girls dropping out more than boys. For instance the completion rate for girls in 2003 was 29% while that for boys was 71% (Nsibambi 2006:114). The difference of 42% is alarming and yet all children are entitled to education.

3.2 Conclusion

UPE policy as launched in 1997 intends to provide basic education to all children. Although there are some shortcomings in the policy on paper as it came out in this study, it appears that if the set objectives are well implemented, UPE provides stands out the best form of universalizing primary education as well as curbing the problem of school dropout in Uganda. It is for this reason that the question on how it is implemented in reality follows in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

UPE POLICY IN PRACTICE AND DROPOUT

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher analyses UPE policy in practice and explores the gaps embedded in it that contribute to school dropout. Since the main objective of UPE is to make education accessible to all children regardless of their background, the researcher goes ahead to assess how UPE in practice matches Farrell's model of equality of access, survival, output and equality of outcome.

With UPE in place; school enrollment increased from 3 million in 1996 to 5.3 million in 1997; by 2000, the number had gone to 6.5 million and by 2006, to 7.3 million children. In addition, the number of teachers on the payroll increased from 88,247 in 1997 to 110,366 in 2000 and to 124,137 by the year 2004 and now stands at about 128,057. With regard to infrastructures, the number of classrooms increased from 25,427 in 1997 to 50,370 in 2000, to 78,403 by 2004 and now stands at 102,648 (Mikiko and Keiichi 2008:102). This shows the effort made by the Government to make UPE accessible to all children though in reality, much remains to be done on the ground in order to curb the problem of school dropout. The available information shows that out of the 2,159,850 pupils enrolled in P.1 in 1997, only about 33% reached P6 by 2002 and 22% reached P7 in 2003; implying that 78% dropped out by 2003 (ibid:105). With this background, the researcher sets to explore the gaps in the practice of UPE that contribute to low survival of children in schools.

4.1 Barriers to survival in the practice of UPE

4.1.1 Infrastructures

Infrastructures include classrooms, latrines/toilets, water facilities as well as the school location. Although the Government of Uganda owns the largest number of primary schools (about 80%), due to declining budgetary resources allocated to education sector, the infrastructures have remained inadequate making it difficult to guarantee equality of education access to all as well as ensuring completion rate to those who enroll (Juuko & Kabonesa 2007:25).

Shortage of infrastructures and competencies to cope with large numbers of pupil is a challenge in the implementation of UPE (MoES 2007). The Uganda Bureau of Statistics in (Tomasevski 1999:16-17) reported 60 % schools to be classified as "non-permanent" and schooling still takes place underneath trees or outside in the field. Building and refurbishing schools to meet the requirements of the large number of learners with limited funds available remains a huge challenge. Such learning environment negatively affects children as they get overcrowded in small rooms and those who attend from outside get scorched by the sun during the dry season while in the rainy season they get wet (Ibid). Generally, children under such circumstances and especially those in the rural who get a chance to access education hardly survive till the end of the whole system. To those who survive in the system , both their output and outcomes are greatly compromised in way that most of them can never join secondary education due to poor performance in primary leaving exams since UPE has lowered the performance of children as well as lack of school dues at secondary level.

Clean environment leads to a sound mind, with budgetary constraints and inadequate infrastructures such as toilets and clean water in UPE schools; one wonders whether with limited budget, schools can have adequate facilities to make conducive learning environment for the pupils. Although UPE on paper promises to provide adequate school facilities through the facility grant, the reality on the ground shows that rapid enrolment was not matched with

increase in infrastructure thus putting high pressure on the existing ones. In 2000 only 8% of all UPE primary schools had sufficient latrines for the pupils, and only one third of these schools had separate latrines for girls. This implies that 92% of all schools suffered from lack of latrines and two thirds had no separate toilets for boys and girls. This has a negative effect on the children's survival in schools as many of them drop out of schools due to sanitation related sickness. This is evidenced in the report from the Ministry of Health (2000) that about 2.7% of all pupils' time is lost to sickness from sanitation related illnesses and most of them never return in schools. This phenomenon is common in rural schools than in urban which shows some discrepancies in the implementation of UPE program that contributes to school dropout (MFPED 2007:172).

Besides latrines/toilets, water is necessary for maintaining equality of access, survival, output and outcome of education for all children. However, access to clean water for many schools has remained a problem in the reality of UPE, an issue that pushes children out of schools (Juuko and Kabonesa 2007:34). According to the MoES 2004 abstract, most primary schools use well/spring water (33.24%), followed by the borehole water of 28.63% which is not safe for drinking while very few urban schools use piped water. The fact that the Government had not taken the responsibility of providing water to these schools, fetching water for school and teachers have become another burden for the pupils and especially those in the rural where water is scarce making children from rural areas to be more disadvantaged than those in urban areas who have piped water. This double burden of making children miss classes while struggling for communal water with the villagers as well as child laboring is a serious problem that is affecting UPE in practice which consequently leads to school dropout.

More so it has previously been reported that girls keep away from school especially during their monthly periods and for some ultimately never returning again to school due to lack of separate latrines and changing room. This was noted by one male teacher during the interview as follows; "*Girls and boys use the*

same latrines/urinals. Those who are shy keep away from school. There is need to separate boys' latrines from those of girls' (Juuko and Kabonesa 2007:42). The fact that many UPE schools lack these facilities, girls are forced to drop out of school since the society expect them to be shy, soft and them not fight for latrines with boys; a factor that makes them to dropout in higher numbers than boys.

For healthy learning to take place, it is recommended that schools should be in a safe reach, convenient geographical location and preferably within the neighborhood of the children (accessible). Schools should preferably be in about two kilometers so as to increase the access of education and survival rate in schools as this would permit pupils to access schools without walking long distance. Though it is evident that four kilometers is extremely long distance for the young children to walk to and from schools (Juuko and Kabonesa 2007:51), the 1989 Education Policy Commission¹ had recommended location of schools within that range. However, UPE policy either on paper or in practice did not put it in consideration. Therefore, the failure to establish UPE schools within the short distances increases the rate at which children dropout of schools and this problem significantly affects many children from rural areas as compared to their counterparts in urban where the means of transport is enhanced to ease the access to schools (Okumu 2008:21).

Although long distance to school affects all children, girls are more affected than boys because of their biological nature. Girls are naturally weak and susceptible to sexual abuse. For this reason, parents are always conscious about them because they may be sexually abused along the way by idle men. This factor makes many parents withdraw girls from schools that are located in distant places as it was evidenced in a recent study by Juuko et al. (2007) as the chairperson of Kamengo in Mpigi district puts it; *“the distance affects them, mostly when it rains. Sometimes they can reach school when they are tired and wet and cannot concentrate. Some if partially weak decide not to go to school because of the distance factor with a feeling that they may not make it to school. Girls on their way to school get disturbed by idle men and boys. So before they finish their journey to the school, they have already been disturbed as some do not reach school and those who do are already exhausted”* (Juuko and

Kabonesa 2007:43). Such statement reflects to why the survival of girls in schools is lower than that of boys in UPE schools.

4.1.2 Costs on UPE education

Despite the fact that the implementation of UPE came with the abolition of school fees and PTA charges, many children still fail to access school while others dropout because of the hidden costs borne by parents¹. The 2005/2006 Uganda National Household Survey found that 8% of households hardly had a meal a day due to poverty. At this rate, it is obvious that such family would rather spend little income they have on food rather than meeting hidden costs of education and especially the uniform which is compulsory. In cases where parent have a problem in meeting these costs, children are sent away from school until they get such money. To some extent, this causes some children to drop out of school while those who manage to go through to primary seven are likely to perform poorly due to time wasted and humiliation faced as they are always depicted as poor and unable to meet these costs.

This scenario is also found in the provision of Lunch as children from very poor families who cannot afford lunch go without lunch which by itself is humiliation enough leave alone studying on an empty stomach. This retards their physical and mental development as one boy who dropped out of primary six illustrates his situation; *“My grandmother could not afford two meals a day. I always ate food once a day at 5:00pm. I tried to stay at school for the afternoon but because of hunger, I would always sleep through the lessons. Teachers beat you for late coming, for sleeping in class, for asking for a short call. How can you explain to such a teacher that you had no supper? So I quit, I have no regrets because I can feed myself now”* (Juuko and Kabonesa 2007). Since UPE does not provide lunch in schools, this incidence happens to many children whose parents can't afford to pay or pack some snack thus compromising equality of survival on the side of poor children. Failure to provide free meals in UPE schools is blamed on the Government; since this would be a strategy to retain children in schools (ibid).

In Uganda like in many African countries patriarchal characteristics are still strong, some parents and teachers favor boys more than girls. The reason is that many parents especially those in the rural think that girls get educated in order to know how to read, write and then be better daughters, wives and mothers, rather than equipping them with skills and knowledge that can enable them to handle their lives well as human being and progressing their career of choice. A study by Atekyereza 2001, showed that married daughters are less likely than married sons to remit cash income to their parents. For such reason, in cases where parents cannot afford to meet educational costs for all children, boys are favored over the girl (Juuko and Kabonesa 2007:45). This among others remains a big concern in the practice of UPE which causes disparities in access and survival in education system for both girls and boys.

4.1.3 HIV infected and affected children

UPE in practice seems unfair to orphans and HIV/AIDS infected and affected children as it does not cover them enough. Due to lack of incentives, these children are excluded from the whole system. The extent, to which they access schools and survive in them once they come to know their HIV status, is not known very well. Their participation in school might imply some additional costs and at the same time, their families might be in need of some subsidies that would encourage school attendance on the part of the infected children as well as enable them cover some of their medical costs and other healthy needs. But because UPE programme has not put into consideration their needs, these children among others form a sizeable number of those who drop out of school due to factors beyond their control. Besides their ill health problems and stigmatization from their fellow children and the teachers; many of them belong to poor families, in rural areas and urban shanty towns. This factor becomes a big challenge to UPE in ensuring equality of survival for them.

4.1.4 Instructional materials

Instructional materials include textbooks, teachers' guides, blackboards, chalk and other class facilities that are necessary to ensure good quality education.

Although the Government seems to have purchased a large number of textbooks as part of UPE implementation strategy, accessing them is limited to few schools which are well equipped.

Worse still, due to high enrollment rates, these books are never enough; for example in 2004 , it was reported at national level that textbook copies for primary four were on average 238,475 to 1,045,514 enrolled pupils, which is equivalent to 1:23 pupils, followed by primary three with an average of 214,217 to 1150525 pupils and then primary five with an average of 187,725to 923709 pupils enrolled (Juuko and Kabonesa 2007:36). In some cases, due to lack of space, books are often kept in stores under lock which makes it impossible for pupils to access them (Bategeka and Okurut 2006:4).The most affected schools are known to be those in the rural and urban slums. Since lack of instructional materials affects both children and teachers, many teachers get discouraged by this situation and de-motivated to teach which lead to poor quality education and in turn, children dropout as a result of poor quality of education.

4.1.5 Disabled children

One of the paramount motives in implementing UPE in Uganda was to make primary education accessible to all and children with disabilities were encouraged to join the mainstream schools. Though this looks a good entry point to the disabled in accessing education and especially to those who had been stigmatized before UPE, it appears that special arrangements for these children are missing (Ssekamwa 1999). For example in UPE schools, children who are visually impaired lack white canes and Braille machine paper, children who are physically handicapped lack wheelchairs, crutches and other facilities that they may need depending on their level of disability. Children who are deaf have little or no access to skilled teachers in sign language and interpreters. Further impacting problem is lack of transport due to the costly maintenance of vehicles and daily transportation of children to school (ibid).

In addition, lack of adequate knowledge and skilled teachers to handle children with traditional disabilities is a factor worthy considering as a strong

case against the success of UPE in ensuring equality survival in school for these children.

4.1.6 Children in war zones

Implementation of UPE policy has had a lot of challenges in the Northern Uganda .For over two decades; this area has experienced a devastating civil war waged by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) against the Government. This war did not only result into massive displacement of the entire population to camps, but seems to have been child-targeting and depriving their right of education. For example, the recent report of the abducted children amounts to about 26,662 (MoES 2007:23).UPE in practice has not taken into consideration the needs of children from this part of the country as there are few schools/ classes within camps . The equality of survival in this situation has been extremely low to those who enroll and those who attempt to persist to continue the equality of output and outcome may not match their counterparts in safe areas due to moving up and down from one camp to another while saving their lives and looking for food (Tomasevski 1999).

4.1.7 Quality of education

Under UPE, good quality of education is reflected on pupils' ability to read, write and speak English (MFPED 2002:141). In order to improve the quality of primary education, the government has devoted some resources to procure some textbooks and construct some classrooms. The increase in education inputs explains the gradual improvement of some education quality indicators from the time UPE was introduced. Nevertheless, these improvements have not always translated into better outputs and outcomes of UPE education as evident in the results of a National Assessment of Primary Education Performance taken between 1996 and 2000, that education performance in terms of pupils' numeric, reading, science, social studies knowledge and skills have deteriorated following the introduction of UPE (Bategeka and Okurut

2006:3). Having in mind that parents have to pay for UPE costs, its poor quality makes it a sound reason for some children to dropout of schools.

Some of the reasons behind poor quality education are for example automatic promotion policy that came with introduction of UPE as a way of minimizing Government expenditure. This has greatly undermined the quality and skills acquired by children as well as encouraging both pupils and parents to wrongly assume that what matters in order to gain promotion is to do exams and not necessary to pass (MFPED 2002:141). This problem affects mostly poor children whose parents cannot afford coaching fees after common classes. During one of the interviews under PPA process; this problem was emphasized as follows; “*UPE emphasizes promotion rather than efficiency. It is so bad that children in schools can neither read nor write their names yet they keep being promoted to higher classes. UPE promotes failures, for example a child who scores 80 marks out of 400 can take the 12th position out of 600 pupils. These are all failures and yet they are promoted to the next class*” (ibid: 142). In this regard, UPE in practice ignores the factor concerning quality education, an issue that makes the rate of survival in school for poor children very low as they avoid wasting their time and money in school without gaining appropriate skills.

Through UPE programme, it is the responsibility of the Government to provide adequate and well trained teachers. It should also monitor their work as well as cater for their well being so as to motivate them for providing quality education (Bategeka and Okurut 2006:2). However the analysis on teacher’s quality reveals that a large proportion of primary school teachers lack appropriate training. For example, in 2003, there were 145,703 primary schoolteachers, of whom 54,069 (37%) had no formal teacher training and only 7,960 had just a teaching certificate, obtained after training on completion of primary education. The majority of unqualified teachers are deployed in UPE rural schools (ibid: 5). With this, one can easily see the extent to which UPE in practice does not guarantee equality of output to children in rural and other disadvantaged areas as untrained teachers are less likely to give low quality teaching, an issue that contributes to school dropout.

According to 2007 primary education assessment report made by the Dutch Operations Evaluation Department, between 20% and 30% of teachers are absent from school at any given time with the main reasons for being delayed and low salaries, long distances from their homes to schools and inadequate supervision (MoES 2007) . In the same report, Joseph Eilor, found that absenteeism of teachers was highest in rural and northern parts of Uganda. As teachers dodge their work at school, pupils also dodge in response to their teacher, a factor that compromises the rate of their survival in school as most of them never come back as the proverb says that; “when the cat is away, the mice plays all over”, whenever teachers are absent, the pupils also skip schooling.

4.1.8 Punishments and harassment

Corporal punishments and harassment destabilize children and prevent them from completing their school. They do not lead to school dropout alone but also expose them to physical and psychological dangers .It is however sad to note that even after introduction of UPE, corporal punishments like heavy beating, digging ant- hills and slashing bushes still exist which compromises equality of survival for children in schools. For instance, one of the pupils in Tabiro primary school in Mpigi district made an astonishing statement during an interview as follows; “*Caning especially on the back, digging a very large piece of land, denial of food at school as a punishment and sweeping a large classroom. One of the children was beaten (in) to comma last year 2005 she is not studying up to now*” (Juuko and Kabonesa 2007:56). This is just a sample of the incidences in UPE schools but the story is that corporal punishments threaten many children in schools which make them run away forever and never to return in school anymore.

Although sexual abuse and harassment is a crime and discouraged by law in Uganda, several reports in the press still show sexual abuse by male teachers on female students. This makes many young girls to get unwanted pregnant and others get intimidated by their teachers, a reason that explain girls’ dropout more than boys (Kakuru 2003:14).

4.2 Conclusion

As a concluding remark, while to some extent UPE in practice has succeeded in ensuring equality of access to education by majority children regardless of their backgrounds. It has however not done well in ensuring equality of survival, output and outcome as retaining children in school as well ensuring good quality of skills and knowledge remains a big challenge to the programme. This explains why the issue of school dropout remains a problem in the education system.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The study investigated the underlying gaps in UPE policy both on paper and in practice and their contribution to school dropout in Uganda. In this chapter, the researcher presents a brief summary on the major findings on the UPE policy gaps that contribute to school dropout with a conclusion and possible recommendations to increase both access to education and survival of children in UPE schools are drawn.

5.1 Summary of the study findings

This study's main objective was to assess the underlying gaps in UPE policy that contribute to school dropout in Uganda. The researcher formulated two research questions in order to meet this objective as follows:

What are the underlying policy gaps in the UPE policy on paper that contribute to primary school dropout in Uganda?

What are the underlying gaps in the UPE policy in practice that contribute to primary school dropout in Uganda?

The analysis of the study is based on right based approach coupled with Farrell's model of equality of education under four facets of equality of access, survival, output and outcome.

5.1.1 Equality of Access and survival

When UPE programme started in 1997, it was seen as the main tool of achieving social, political and economic objectives in Uganda. Its main goal was to provide basic education to all children of school age, in other words to universalize education (MoES 1998:2). UPE also aims at ensuring completion of primary school cycle by all who enrolled. To achieve this, different stakeholders who include Government, local authority and school

Management Committees were assigned specific responsibilities. However the Government retained the greatest role of ensuring that UPE programme achieves its main goal.

Since UPE involves cost sharing, the researcher found out that this was an oversight in its design that contributes to dropout as many parents cannot afford the costs associated with UPE.

Among other things, inadequate teachers, insufficient school facilities, inadequate instructional materials and unavailability of schools that make children walk for long distance to and from schools all gang up together to push children out of UPE schools.

The fact that the school facilities available do not match the number of pupils' enrolment, it becomes hard for many children to cope with such conditions and many of them are discouraged to a point of dropping out of schools.

Automatic promotion policy in UPE schools coupled with demoralized teachers who hardly earn their salaries have deteriorated the quality of education leading to low survival of children in schools thereby dropping out.

The researcher found out that in practice, UPE does not give any special consideration and support to the disadvantaged children such as: the disabled, those in war zones, the orphans and the HIV/AIDS infected and the poor so as to enable them complete their primary education. Due to this reason, majority of these children do not survive the full course of primary education.

Though the policy is praised for having reduced gender disparities in enrolment of boys and girls, it is realized that UPE on paper left out some key policies like back to school after pregnancy that would address the problems that make girls dropout more than boys. As a result, girls drop out in larger numbers than boys. More so, inadequate facilities such as: toilets, water, changing room, poor hygiene coupled with long distances travelled to school, sexual harassment and charges on education are the factors embedded in the practice of UPE that affect negatively girls more than boys due to their

biological nature. And this illustrates the reasons behind higher numbers of girls dropping out UPE schools than boys.

5.1.2 Equality of output and outcome

Though the policy emphasizes good quality education in schools as a way of ensuring equality of output and outcome, many challenges and weaknesses in UPE policy on paper and practice make many children not survive the education system. The researcher therefore found that since equality of survival is not guarantee, both equality of output and outcome may not be realised at the end of the day.

In most cases where children survive through the system, their performance in terms of grades, ability to read and write is of low quality due to unreliable teachers and lack of scholastic materials. This compromises the equality of output as well as outcome.

5.3 Conclusion of the study

From the study findings, it can be concluded that to a greater degree, UPE programme has succeeded in increasing the enrolment for both girls and boys in UPE schools. During the study, it came out that since 1997, all schools recorded high enrolment rates and majority of children of school going age both in the rural and urban were given free entry to primary education. On the other hand, due to the existing gaps in the policy both on paper and in practice, survival of those who enrol has not been encouraging as many of them have failed to complete the full primary cycle.

The researcher found out that some of the major policy gaps that contribute to dropout in UPE schools are, lack of gender specific policies to address specific needs for girls, cost sharing which mostly affects children from poor families, , lack of specific policies for marginalised and disabled children and insufficient school facilities which emanates from insufficient funding.

5.4 Recommendations

From the findings, it is clear that the objective of UPE to universalize education was good but with existence of school dropout, it seems that at some point something is not well addressed yet. It is for this reason that both the government and education policy makers should work towards closing the gaps that contribute to school dropout in of UPE schools.

At this point, the researcher puts forward the following recommendations in an effort to contribute towards improvement of UPE and to curb the current dropout in UPE schools.

In order to reduce the burden on poor parents, the Government should consider shouldering some of UPE related costs such as providing scholastic materials like books, pens and uniforms which will in turn increase retention rate as well as the quality of education in schools. This can be achieved through sourcing for extra funds from both local and international donors. If scholastic materials are provided to all children, there is a possibility that majority of those who drop out of school due to lack of finances to buy them, they will be retained in school.

As the case of Kenya, the Government has successfully sensitized parents on the need to contribute to the education of their children. The researcher believes that if the same is done in Uganda, the parents will learn to contribute towards providing educational needs for their children which to some degree will reduce the rate of school dropout.

In order to retain more girls in school, the government should have provision of toilets and changing rooms for girls separate from those of boys. More so, men and especially male teachers and boys should be sensitized in respecting the rights of girls and be punished thoroughly for harassing girls sexually.

The policy of drop back in schools on girls who get pregnant should be encouraged in all UPE schools so that girls come back in schools after delivering.

In order to improve the education quality, the government should work towards removing the automatic promotion of pupils from one class to another before they pass well to join the higher level. The government should also consider increasing allocation of school inspection as well as improve teachers' remuneration in order to boost their morale.

There is also need for the government to prioritize primary education and increase the education budget so as to match the enrollment rates in UPE schools.

The Government should make efforts of constructing special units within the mainstream schools to meet the needs of children with special learning needs such as providing special grants for children with disabilities to enable them acquire special equipments to facilitate their learning .

In conclusion, though UPE has been found to have various weaknesses impeded in it, whenever it has been implemented much gain in enrollment and retention have been achieved. Therefore, all that need to be done in Uganda is to strengthen and improve the policy so as to be able to meet its desired goals.

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