

Comprehensive Evaluation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Programme

Theme: “Efficacy of the Primary School Curriculum in Supporting the Realization of UPE”

Abstract

An adequate and efficiently implemented primary school curriculum is a foundation for attainment of the UPE outcomes. It is at the primary level that the capacity to learn, to read and use math, to acquire information, and to think critically about that information are developed. The current Uganda’s Primary Education Curriculum has gone through a series of reforms aimed at improving the quality of children’s learning in primary schools. The most recent reform commenced in 2007 and was concluded in 2012. Despite the recent review of the primary school curriculum, there have been reports doubting its relevance in facilitating the achievement of the UPE curriculum. This policy brief gives highlights of the findings and policy advice from the main assessment of the Efficacy of the Primary School Curriculum in Supporting the Realization of UPE Policy

Objectives, which was one of the six thematic areas of the independent comprehensive evaluation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Policy undertaken by the National Planning Authority. It was found that: (i) the current primary school curriculum is relevant and adequate, however, its implementation fails the realization of the intended UPE objectives (ii) there is a policy disconnect between curriculum development and the approval of textbooks and non-textbook materials (iii) the current assessment (in school and by UNEB) impedes the implementation of the curriculum as teaching is narrowed to only examinable subjects. It is recommended that: a curriculum and assessment policy be developed by the MoES to synchronize assessment and curriculum implementation; teachers should be trained on the practicum of implementing the curriculum as intended and; the role to approve the list of vetted textbooks to be procured should revert to NCDC.

Introduction

The introduction of UPE in 1997 necessitated a review of the primary curriculum on the understanding that a relevant primary school curriculum would attract and retain learners in school, a core objective of UPE policy. However, different studies have continued to implicate the primary education curriculum as being of questionable quality and relevance. This called for and led to a spiral of curriculum reviews that culminated into the current primary school curriculum, which is designed to: (i) provide the facilities and resources to enable every child to enter

and remain in school until the primary cycle of education is complete; (ii) make education equitable in order to eliminate disparities and inequalities; (iii) ensure that education is affordable by the majority of Ugandans; and (iv) reduce poverty by equipping every individual with basic skills.

Despite the various reviews of the primary school curriculum, there have been reports doubting its relevance in facilitating the achievement of the

UPE curriculum. To this end, this evaluation sets out to review and analyze the primary school curriculum with regard to relevance of its elements and the extent of its implementation towards achieving UPE objectives.

The analysis was informed by the standard OECD-DAC evaluation principles. In addition, the analysis drew on variety of data sources including; the UNHS, EMIS, UNEB, NAPE, MTEF, World Bank, UNESCO, and NPA Survey (2017) and both quantitative and qualitative methods were used.

Key Findings

1. **Whereas the current primary school curriculum is relevant and adequate for the attainment of UPE objectives, the nature and manner in which it is implemented fails the realization of the intended UPE objectives. In line with UPE objectives, the curriculum content covers the three knowledge domains (cognitive, *Between 36%–42.5% of primary schools give tests daily* affective and psychomotor), and generally focuses on universalization of literacy, numeracy, science and technology, and the skills for the world of work. The thematic curriculum is particularly relevant to addressing poor mastery of literacy and numeracy, among others. However;**
 - (i) **Contrary to the curriculum design, the content delivered in practice is narrow, mainly focusing on the cognitive domain** at the expense of the other equally relevant content (i.e. Creative Arts and Physical Education). This is majorly against the backdrop of the other content beyond the cognitive domain being non-examinable.
 - (ii) **Contrary to the curriculum provisions, the purpose of assessment in practice is biased towards preparing learners to pass the highly staked final examinations instead of improving the learning and teaching processes.** A large number of schools administer tests to their pupils daily in order to maximise pass rates and not
2. **There exists several disconnections and contradictions in the current primary school curriculum that create inconsistencies towards the realization of its intended objectives.** For instance:
 - (i) *Contradiction in language of teaching instruction and that of assessment.* At lower primary level, the local language is used for instruction and yet English is used for assessment.
 - (ii) *The single-class teacher system is non-responsive to the current bulged class sizes in lower primary.* This is because majority of the classrooms are heavily populated to be managed by one class teacher. Additionally, a single teacher may not be talented, interested and/or competent to teach all the thematic areas; hence compromising the quality of learning the pupils are exposed to.
 - (iii) *Disconnection between curriculum development and the approval of textbooks and non-textbook materials for use in curriculum delivery.* While NCDC is responsible for curriculum development and ensuring its implementation, the approval of textbooks and non-textbook materials is a function of Instruction Materials Unit (IMU) under the MoES. This separation of related functions creates a disconnect between curriculum design and curriculum implementation materials and is likely to lead to mismatches between the two.
3. **Despite efforts by the National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC) to consult widely in developing the primary school curriculum, the process is still highly centralized and heavily top-down.** This has created a double jeopardy of limited acceptability of the curriculum and the illusion that the curriculum

is totally irrelevant, since most of the stakeholders feel that they are not extensively and intensively consulted.

4. The institutional capacity for effective implementation and monitoring of the primary school curriculum is weak and not adequately facilitated to achieve its mandate.

There are systemic weaknesses within the institutional, and legal/policy architecture for curriculum development. The key institutions that lead the development and implementation of the curriculum are significantly constrained in terms of human resources, financial resources and physical materials. For instance:

(i) *The NCDC and the Directorate of Education Standards (DES) are acutely incapacitated, in terms of human and financial resources required. This negatively affects the development of a relevant curriculum, and its effective monitoring and evaluation.*

(ii) *There has also been under investment in enabling teachers to implement the curriculum. For instance: teachers lack the competences to correctly interpret the primary school curriculum; majority do not plan their lessons while those who plan, do it poorly and as ritual without regard to the tenets of a good lesson planning.*

3. **The role to approve the list of vetted textbooks to be procured by the Instruction Materials Unit should revert to NCDC.** This is intended to promote separation of powers and address the quality aspect of textbooks being procured. After development of the list of text book by the IMU, the NCDC should examine and confirm evaluation aspects and approve the list of the textbooks that meet 100 percent of the curriculum content.
4. **Rejuvenate the teacher professional development support mechanisms,** particularly the Coordinating Centres (CCs) and the Coordinating Centre Tutors (CCTs) to ensure provision of on-site re-orientation and professional support for teachers in the identified key areas of weakness including; lesson planning, assessment, classroom pedagogy and curriculum interpretation among others.



Teacher training in the development of blended teaching-learning materials. Photo courtesy of UNESCO

Policy Recommendations

To ensure that the primary education curriculum delivers the intended UPE objectives, the following are recommended:

1. A curriculum and assessment policy be developed to synchronize assessment and curriculum development and implementation
2. **Teachers should be trained on the practicum of undertaking continuous assessment,** which is the preferred method recommended by the curriculum. Equally, materials that complement continuous assessment should be provided to teachers on time.

5. **Establish a National Institute of Teacher Education and Development.** This will help to provide leadership for training, reskilling and development of the teachers and education administrators for them to be able to deliver the curriculum as intended.
6. **The transition curriculum should be mainstreamed within the teacher training curriculum** to provide for the peculiar professional needs of P4 teachers.

7. **The NCDC should develop a comprehensive Strategy for meaningful and perpetual engagement with all stakeholders in curriculum development.** This is required to address the double constraints of relevance and acceptability, with the core curriculum implementing institutions particularly the schools and local authorities. The strategy should provide for an unconstrained platform through which schools and Local Authorities can play a central role in the planning and development of the curriculum.
8. **NCDC should urgently be strengthened into a robust institution (i.e. One Stop Centre for curriculum activities) to undertake critical research and conduct credible consultations, write and continuously review the curriculum as the country requires.** This necessitates that an adequate budget is provided to enable the institution fully execute its mandate. In particular, NCDC should be resourced to fill the currently 68 (44%) vacant positions that are required to execute its mandate.
9. **The language of instruction and assessment for the lower primary school should be harmonized and enforced in both private and government-aided schools to optimize its intended benefits.** Many schools are hesitant to implement this policy given the misalignment between the language of instruction and language of assessment at the lower primary level.
10. **The entire Primary School Curriculum should be based on themes to ensure alignment between lower and upper primary.** This will also help to align with the lower secondary curricular which is also arranged around thematic learning areas.
11. **The MoES should provide the threshold amount of physical infrastructure and teaching materials to**

every public school to effectively implement the curriculum. At the minimum; each school should be guaranteed at least 7 permanent classrooms, a staffroom and separate toilets for boys and girls. Also, according to the preliminary costs' analysis, capitation grant should be raised from UGX 10,000 to a minimum of UGX 59,000 per year per pupil, if schools are to optimally operate.

Conclusion

The current primary school curriculum is relevant and adequate to the attainment of UPE objectives. It does not require major overhaul to deliver intended UPE outcomes. However, to make the curriculum effective, there are areas that need to be urgently addressed to ensure that the curriculum is implemented efficiently and effectively as intended to achieve UPE outcomes

References & Useful links

1. National Planning Authority (2018). *Efficacy of the Primary School Curriculum in Supporting the Realization of UPE*. NPA, Kampala, Uganda
2. UBOS (2017). *UNHS (2016/17)*. Uganda Bureau of Standards.

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