

Comprehensive Evaluation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Programme

Theme: “Effectiveness of the Policy, Legal, Regulatory and Institutional Framework”

Abstract

The 1992 Government White Paper provided for Universal Primary Education as one of the main policy tools for achieving poverty reduction and human development. Since the introduction of UPE in 1997, no comprehensive evaluation of the policy has ever been conducted to take stock of the gains attained, challenges faced, and lessons learnt during implementation of the UPE policy. This policy brief presents the key findings and policy advice arising from the policy, legal, regulatory and institutional framework thematic area of the recently concluded independent comprehensive evaluation of UPE policy undertaken by NPA. Overall, it was found that although there is an elaborate and institutionalized legal, policy, regulatory and institutional framework to support UPE, there is no policy document detailing what UPE is and how it was to be implemented. In addition, there are hardly any statutory instruments issued by the Minister of Education and Sports on UPE as required by the Education Act, 2008. Significant weaknesses were found in the design and or implementation of key policies including; automatic promotion policy, textbook policy, ECD policy, instruction in local language policy, guidelines on school feeding, decentralization of provision of primary education, and one public primary school per parish. It is recommended that comprehensive documentation of UPE policy should be undertaken and the minister should issue a statutory instrument on UPE as required under the Education Act, 2008.

Introduction

In line with its mandate, under the National Planning Authority Act 15, 2002 Sections 7(2) and 7(3d), the Authority undertook an independent comprehensive evaluation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Policy to inform wide-ranging policy planning and implementation improvements. This evaluation covers the extent of implementation of key proposed reforms based on assumptions before and during UPE implementation, with specific focus on the policy, legal, regulatory and institutional framework. It is the first in a series of six thematic areas of the comprehensive evaluation of UPE policy in Uganda. The overall objective of the evaluation is to assess the policy impact of the UPE program and provide a benchmark for informed policy action for further improvement of the quality of UPE as envisaged in Uganda's development policy frameworks, the National Development Plans and the Uganda Vision 2040.

The findings of the evaluation in this thematic area are based on a mixture of approaches used in the assessment, including collection of primary data from local administrations and schools, and secondary data from; the UNHS, EMIS, UNEB, NAPE, World Bank, UNESCO. The findings are therefore structured along the following areas: (i) Policies; (ii) legal frameworks; and (iii) Institutional Framework.

Key Findings

1. **Primary education in Uganda has one of the most elaborate policy, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks.** Government of Uganda has formulated a number of policies on primary education to propel the sector into achieving Education for All (EFA) targets (see Table 1).

Table 1: Selected education policies and regulations

1.	Government White Paper on Education (GWP 1992)
2.	The Education (Pre-primary, primary and post primary) Act, 2008
3.	Physical Education and Sports Policy (2004)
4.	Non-Formal Education Policy, 2011
5.	Gender in Education Policy (GEP 2009)
6.	Abolition of school fees /UPE policy
7.	Automatic Promotion Policy, 2005
8.	Text Book Policy
9.	Instruction in Local Language Policy (Lower Primary)
10.	Early Childhood Development Policy, 2007
11.	Basic Education Policy for Disadvantaged Groups (2006)
12.	Education and Sports National Policy Guidelines on HIV/AIDS (2006)
13.	Guidelines on Violence Against Children in schools (2015)
14.	Customized Performance Targets Policy

2. **Although UPE is the cornerstone of Uganda’s primary education sub-sector, there is no document detailing what it is and how it was supposed to be implemented.** The UPE policy is not anywhere in writing and thus, the policy was therefore not properly targeted and sequenced.
3. **Most of the policies are just pronouncements** and have been disseminated in form of guidelines and in workshops. These include: Universal education policy; Automatic Grade promotion policy; ECD Policy; Local language policy; and Abolition of PTA charges.
4. **While automatic promotion has enabled every pupil to progress to next levels, reduced dropout rate, increased access to education and motivated pupils to learn,** the policy has had a negative effect on the quality of primary education. This is attributed to lack of competition, de-motivation of pupils and teachers, hence lowering of teaching and learning outcomes.
5. **The textbook and instructional materials policy resulted in a reduction in the unit costs of primary textbooks however, the anticipated textbook-pupil ratio was not achieved.** The policy announced in 1993 removed the monopoly of the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) writing and supplying books for schools. The supply of instructional materials to schools was liberalized, which levelled the playing ground that hitherto favored only foreign publishers. Due to the transparent competitive tendering process, the unit

cost of primary textbooks procured for the same grades and subjects reduced by 58% from USD3.67 in 1998 to USD1.53 in 2002. The policy also introduced vetting of all books and other materials going to schools and decentralized selection of materials to school level. However, the anticipated textbook-pupil ratio of 1:1 was not achieved partly due to the continued increase in enrollment numbers for pupils. The textbook-pupil ratio stood at 1:3 in 2017.



6. **There is a policy disconnect between curriculum development and the approval of textbooks and non-textbook materials.** Approval of textbooks for use in curriculum delivery is a function of the MoES instead of NCDC.
7. **The current policy of limited government involvement in ECD, has limited access especially by the rural poor.** As prescribed by the Education Act, Pre-primary education in Uganda is optional. In addition, the LG Act at present has no mention of ECD services to operationalize the ECD policy at the district level. ECD as services are largely provided by the private sector. Consequently, there is limited adoption of ECD.
8. **Amidst various challenges, the use of local language policy has enhanced the comprehension ability of the children.** Following implementation of the local language policy, literacy and numeracy competencies at P.3 (equivalent to Grade 3) have improved to 69.8% and 60.2% respectively (NAPE, 2015) from 45.6% and 42.6% (NAPE, 2006). However, diversity of languages, limited capacity among teachers in local language, and inadequate local language instruction materials are undermining the gains made by the policy.

9. **Weak supervision structure for the customized performance targets policy has affected compliance to standards.** The policy implementation structure that required sub county chiefs to supervise headteacher performance against the set targets has met resistance, as their capacity was contested. A majority of stakeholders including parents, community, and School Management Committees are unaware of the existence and objectives of this policy.
10. **The Education Act does not provide for regulation of teacher recruitment in private schools.** Private schools recruit teachers without control of government and without paying attention to the guidelines set by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). Majority of teachers in private schools do not have contracts and are vulnerable to losing jobs.
11. **Parents have neglected their roles and duties as provided in the Education Act, especially that of feeding their children.** Many parents think it is the role of government to feed their children. The long-time absence of clarity on the matter has aggravated the problem of negligence of parents providing lunches to their children.
13. **UPE was found not to be free as always communicated by policy makers.** Several charges are inflicted on parents. Findings indicate that children continue to drop out of school because education is expensive following the several charges inflicted on parents and a lack of scholastic materials.
14. **There is lack of a comprehensive and approved compendium of standards** for the primary Education Sector as required by the Education Act, 2008.
15. The current legal and institutional architecture of the inspection function where the inspectorate at the district reports to the CAO and not DES, and where the DES reports to the Permanent Secretary MoES, continues to negatively impact on the quality of inspection and hence the quality of UPE.
16. **Non-existence of a policy that guides continuous assessment in Uganda is a significant barrier to tracking of progress in the quality of UPE learning outcomes.** The Uganda National Examinations Board Act, 1983 gives UNEB the mandate to undertake assessment of the Primary curriculum at the end of the cycle and leaves continuous assessment to individual schools. Assessment is therefore not uniform as it's often limited to only examinable subjects, especially in private schools. Areas such as Music, Dance and Drama and co-curricular activities are often neglected.



School Feeding: Photo courtesy of the New Vision

12. **The continued splitting of sub counties to create more parishes makes implementation of the policy on one primary school per parish a challenge since this does not take cognizance of the distance to the nearest primary school.** There are currently 525 parishes (as of 2017) that require construction of a Government aided primary school. The policy does not also take care of the existing private schools in the parishes.
- 1) The Ministry of Education and Sports should comprehensively document what UPE is and how it should be implemented so as to streamline its implementation, inspection and Monitoring and Evaluation.
- 2) Government should consider provision of ECCE in areas of very low access, and institutionalize inspection and teacher training for ECCE
- 3) The Minister should issue a statutory instrument on UPE to clarify on the scope of the UPE, stakeholder roles, enforcement and consequences of breach of policy provisions. This will diffuse tensions between parents, teachers and the politicians.

- 4) To increase the effectiveness of the UPE policy, government should enforce the provisions of the law on school feeding and consider a needs-based approach in such regions where households have genuinely failed to feed their children in school.
- 5) The Ministry of Education and Sports should establish an enabling environment for enforcement of the automatic promotion policy in order not to compromise the quality standards of learning outcomes.
- 6) The Ministry of Education and Sports should enforce the fees regulation guidelines in primary schools. Charges are one of the reasons children drop out of school and this contradicts policy on UPE since Universal access to education should mean the ability of all people (not only state funded) to have equal opportunity in education, regardless of their social class, gender, ethnicity background or physical and mental disabilities.
- 7) The Ministry of Education and Sports should leverage on National Identification Numbers (NIN) and ICT to track and help the pupils who drop out of school and those who are yet to enrol in school.
- 8) Review policy and establish a semi-autonomous or autonomous body responsible for carrying out inspection. The school inspection function of all basic education and post-primary training should be re-centralized and consolidated under one independent non-ministerial entity reporting directly to Parliament.

Conclusion

The findings show that Uganda has an elaborate and institutionalised legal framework to support implementation of UPE. Nonetheless, significant gaps exist particularly within their design and or implementation. To this end a double pronged approach is recommended to develop, review relevant policies and enforce existing policies for better implementation of UPE.

References & Useful links

1. NPA (2018). *Comprehensive Evaluation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Policy*; Policy, Legal, Regulatory and Institutional Framework. National Planning Authority.
2. Government of Uganda (2008). *Education (Pre-Primary, Primary and Post Primary) Act, 2008*
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