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**Implementing Universal Secondary Education in Busoga  
Sub Region: Challenges Faced by Private  
and Public Stakeholders**

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**Abstract**

*This article examines the challenges faced in the implementation of the Universal Secondary Education in Uganda. The findings in this article are derived from a study which adopted a cross-sectional survey design. It examined a study population and sample from Busoga Region in Eastern Uganda and data was collected from a number of stakeholders which included secondary school going children in USE schools, Teachers, Head Teachers, and parents of schools participating in USE. The Study revealed that USE schools in Busoga Region were facing several challenges in the implementation of the programme such as inadequate facilities, lack of enough teachers, lack of requirements for disabled children, lack of cooperation from parents and high dropout rates among many others. The study concluded that the lack of infrastructure was due to inadequate participation by the government of Uganda. The researchers recommended that all secondary education stakeholders should provide the necessary inputs to ensure fruition of the USE programme in the region.*

**Key Words:** *Economics of Education; Universal Secondary Education; Equity in Education*

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## Introduction

The provision of education in Uganda has always been a venture for both private and public enterprises. Education was introduced in the country by the Missionaries way back in 1877 by the Catholics followed closely by the protestant church in 1879. The goal by then was to spread Christianity and education was considered an avenue to enable new converts read and interpret the Bible. Government came in later at the recommendation of the 1925 education ordinance.

The public sector is the part of the economy concerned with providing various governmental services. The composition of the public sector varies by country, but in most countries the public sector includes such services as the military, police, public infrastructure like roads, water supply, telecommunications, education, health, among others. The public sector in most cases provides services that a non-payer cannot be excluded from (such as street lighting), services which benefit all of society rather than just the individual who uses the service (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>).

In the United States, according to the business dictionary, the public sector encompasses universal, critical services such as national defense, homeland security, police protection, fire fighting, urban planning, corrections, taxation, and various social programs (<http://www.businessdictionary.com>)

The Uganda Government has got involved in education provision in several ways including, but not limited to funding, policy formulation and implementation, instituting and operating various education parastatal bodies that play significant roles in education. As regards funding, this constitutes the most important way through which the government gets involved in education matters. The government focuses on school teaching, vocational training, teacher training and development, and research. To this end, government contributes capitation grant to all government-aided education institutions, provides educational inputs like laboratory equipment, funds government programmes like Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE), sponsors students at higher education institutions like Universities, pays teachers and other staff in government aided education institutions, pays educational administrators, among many other activities. In the 2015/2016 financial year, government spent 11.1% of her GDP on education; this was next to Mineral exploration and development with 15.4%; Security with 18.9%; roads with 18.2% (Government of Uganda Budget Performance 2016).

It is important to note that the one who has the financial muscle controls policy to their advantage especially through policy formulation (Okun 1975). Education policy in Uganda is initiated and implemented by the government through its various organs. Some of the current policy documents governing education theory and practice include the Kajubi Education Review Commission Report of 1989 and the consequent White Paper on Education of 1992; the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001 as amended; the Universal Secondary Education Framework of 2007; the Universal Primary Education Framework 1997 among others. It is through such policy frameworks that government directs the trend of education activities in the country.

Lastly, the government has instituted a number of parastatal bodies charged with various functions regarding education. The case in point is bodies such as the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE); Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB); Education Standards Agency (ESA); National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) among many others.

The government of Uganda has got involved in education provision majorly because it can provide the service on a large scale. Economists like Ayot & Briggs (1992) Psacharopolous (1985) have argued that where there is need for large scale production/provision, the public sector will be most appropriate. This has the advantage that government will not only enjoy economies of large scale production but also society will benefit from such

provision. Until the 1980s, Uganda had only public universities basically due to the huge amount of money required to venture into such investments. Furthermore, the government has the largest number of educational institutions in the country. The private sector only came in recently at higher levels but still the majority of the educational institutions belong to the government.

Similar to the above is that the government is not driven by profits, instead it is more on the side of provision of services. An example is the provision of a wide range of programmes at public Universities some of which may not be viable. Such a scenario may not happen in a private university. The private sector would keep an eye on the expected returns and if any programme is found less profitable, it will be dropped in preference for more profitable programmes.

Educational economists like Psacharopolous (1985), Okun (1975) have argued that education, just like health, public works, roads, security is a public good. The argument therefore goes that since the public sector provides all the other public goods, then it should equally provide education since it is one of the public goods.

Social benefits are the advantages enjoyed by society as a whole. The argument advanced is that education of individuals provides benefits to all members of a given society. Therefore if the public is expected to benefit, then the entire public must pay given the expected benefits. Some of the benefits that accrue to society as a result of education include residence-related benefits like low crime rates, employment-related benefits, reduced need for corrective action and social welfare, democratic governance, intelligent community among others.

According to UNESCO, Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits (<http://www.unesco.org>). The argument therefore is that since the public provides all the other human rights, it should similarly provide education.

Education helps in the fight against ignorance, disease, poverty all of which characterize most developing countries. Education is indeed a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully as citizens. According to the Late Nelson Mandela “**Education is the single most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world**” Illiteracy is one of the characteristics of underdevelopment. High infant mortality rates as a result of even immunisable diseases still characterize most of the third world countries. UNESCO similarly argues that Education is a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully as citizens (<http://www.unesco.org>). Therefore it is just logical that to fight ignorance, disease, and poverty massively the public sector must invest in education.

It is important to note on the other hand that government owned projects and facilities are prone to abuse in form of corruption and mismanagement. It is common knowledge at Makerere University; the oldest and most prestigious University in Uganda; that government-sponsored students tend to take their studies less seriously than the private sponsored students. Similarly in cases where the government borrows to fund education, there are logistical challenges like lack of complementary inputs; increased recurrent costs; unfavorable donor conditionalities; scholarships that only benefit a minority at the expense of the majority.

### **Conceptualization of the Study**

According to Globalia, the public sector consists of at least three types of organisations namely: core government, agencies and public enterprises. Core government consists of a governing body with a defined territorial authority. Core governments include all departments, ministries, or branches of the government that are integral parts of the structure, and are accountable to and report directly to the central authority — the legislature, council, cabinet, or executive head.

Agencies on the other hand consist of public organizations that are clearly a part of the government and deliver public programs, goods, or services, but that exist as separate organizations in their own right — possibly as legal entities — and operate with a partial degree of operational independence. They often, but not necessarily, are headed by a board of directors, commission, or other appointed body.

Public enterprises finally are agencies that deliver public programs, goods, or services, but operate independently of government and often have their own sources of revenue in addition to direct public funding. They also may compete in private markets and may make profits. However, in most cases the government is the major shareholder, and these enterprises partly follow the acts and regulations that govern the core government. ([www.globaliaa.org](http://www.globaliaa.org))

Education qualifies for the first category since in most countries it is a recognized Ministry with clearly defined structures and reports directly to the central authorities, in most cases the government, parliament as stipulated in different countries. In Uganda there is the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Sports charged with the responsibility of providing primary, secondary, vocational and technical, and University education and training; and spearheading development of Technology and sports in the country. It is through the MoESTS that the government channels its influence on education in Uganda. In brief the Ministry is charged with the management of education in the country.

In this study, the public sector was considered to be that part of the national economy providing basic goods and services that are either not or cannot be provided by the private sector. More specifically the focus was on education as a service provided by the public sector. The Government has taken keen interest and played several roles in education right from 1925 when it started taking part in the provision of education (Ssekamwa 2000).

Private sector on the other hand encompasses all for-profit businesses that are not owned or operated by the government. It includes charities and other nonprofit organizations that are part of the voluntary sector (<http://www.investopedia.com>). The private sector is the segment of a national economy owned, controlled and managed by private individuals or enterprises. It includes the personal sector (households) and corporate sector (companies), and is responsible for allocating most of the resources within an economy. The private sector may include communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations, trade unions, private companies, small-scale informal providers and individual practitioners all of which may collaborate with Government in order to provide and/or raise education quality.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical basis of this study was the Human Capital theory as aptly described by economists such as Olaniyan & Okemakinde (2008); Schultz (1971); Hanushek (1979) Sachs & Larrain (1993); Ablett & Slengesol (2000); Psacharopoulos & Woodhall (1995). The Human Capital theory asserts that the development of human skills is an important factor in the production activities of any nation. These economists argue that on their own, natural endowments like mineral deposits, fertile agricultural land, water resources, forestry resources, and other natural resources cannot produce useful goods and services. It is only when such natural resources are exploited by human beings using their skills, knowledge, and progressive attitudes (human capital) that they can be productive and that human capital is acquired through formal education. The Human Capital theory further argues that an educated population is a productive workforce. It emphasizes that education increases the productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing the level of cognitive stock of economically productive human capability which is a product of innate abilities and investment in human beings (Schultz 1971). It is such sentiments that guide governments in investing in education and parents in their decision to send their children to school.

Therefore, given the expected benefits of education, individuals will go ahead and join school in order to reap such benefits, hence enrollment. According to Ablett & Slengesol (2000), there is overwhelming evidence to show that investment in education yields high returns in low- and middle-income countries. Studies specifically indicate that rates of return are generally greatest for primary, followed by secondary and then tertiary education (World Bank 1995). The government of Uganda together with private individuals and organisations have partnered in the provision of secondary education for similar reasons.

### Contextualization of the Study

Just like in any other part of the country, Universal Secondary Education (USE) in Busoga region was launched in 2007. Busoga region includes the Districts of Kamuli, Buyende, Jinja, Iganga, Bugiri, Luuka, Kaliro, Mayuge. These Districts are predominantly inhabited by the Basoga, Balamogi, Basiki, although some pockets of the Bakenye, Itesots, Japadhola, Kumam, Samia, and other tribal groups do exist here and there. The main economic activity in the region is mixed peasant agriculture and crops include cotton, coffee, cocoa, sweet potatoes, groundnuts, beans, millet, cassava, simsim, maize, bananas, rice and others; over and above the keeping of cattle, goats and chicken basically for home consumption.

Mixed peasant agriculture is the growing of crops and rearing of animals on the same farm for subsistence purposes with very little left for commercial purposes. The region also produces some citrus fruits (Uganda Districts Information Handbook 2005-2006 Edition). The majority of the inhabitants practice mixed farming and the salient labour source for most families is the husband, wife, and the children in the family; although very few households use ox-drawn ploughs for cultivation. Harvesting is basically manually done with the family as the key source of labour. School enrollment is still low as a result of the social-cultural and socio-economic setup of the region. Table 1 presents the school enrollment in some of the Districts in the Busoga region.

**Table 1: Enrollment and number of schools in Busoga Region**

DISTRICT	ENROLLMENT			PERCENTAGE	
	Male	Female	Total	Population	% Enrollment
Bugiri	68,042	66,657	134,699	426,522	31.6
Iganga	123,521	133,713	257,234	716,311	36.0
Jinja	51,988	54,802	106,790	413,937	25.8
Kamuli	109,042	110,329	219,371	712,079	30.9
Mayuge	62,319	64,567	126,886	326,567	38.9

*Source: Uganda Districts Information Handbook: Expanded Edition 2005-2006*

Different reports such as Wafula (2011); Muwagga & Kaahwa (2008); Nakanyike et al (2002) reveal that school enrollment, attendance, and completion are impacted by the seasonal economic activities. It is also revealed that during the rain season, children are kept at home either to assist in planting or to look after their siblings while the parents are busy in the gardens. Similarly during the harvesting season, children are required to assist either in harvesting, looking after siblings when the parents go to harvest, or to attend to the gardens in various ways (Bategeka 2005; Wafula 2011). It is particularly revealed that in the districts of Bugiri, Luuka, Kaliro, Pallisa, Tororo, and Mayuge where rice growing is widely practiced, children of the ages 6 to 11 are sent to the rice gardens to scare away birds and rodents from the fields.

## **Universal Secondary Education in Uganda**

Uganda introduced USE in 2007; becoming the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to adopt such a policy (Asankha & Takashi 2013). Under this policy, Government began to offer free secondary education to all students who had completed and performed upto a certain level in their Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). It is important to note that although only public secondary schools were expected to participate in the USE programme, some private secondary school owners also enlisted their schools to participate in the programme. According to the Ministry of Education and Sports, parents are free to send their children to any secondary school around the country (Chapman et al 2009). According the USE policy, although students are free of paying tuition fees in USE schools, they still have to pay boarding fees, buy scholastic materials, buy uniform, pay medical fees and others that the particular school may deem necessary. MoES further reveals that there are more than half a million secondary school children who are studying under the USE policy in some 1,471 schools. This is a vast improvement in terms of access to secondary schools (MoES Annual Report 2013). It should be noted that according to Chapman (2009), even school head teachers, who are one of the important factors to ensure success of this policy, are still confused about their ability and knowledge to implement of their role in the programme.

The USE programme, in contrast to the sister UPE programme at Primary level is NOT universal; it only applies to Ordinary Level NOT to the Advanced Level. Furthermore, USE was not implemented in all public schools; instead it was only implemented in public and private secondary schools that had tuition fees below government stipulated thresholds such that it would be financially viable for the government to fund (Chapman et al 2009).

## **Statement of the Problem**

The Public and Private sectors play a significant role in the provision of education. The reasons for this kind of involvement are varied but they are routed in the important role played by education in the development process as contained in the human capital theory. The government of Uganda has partnered with the private sector to provide secondary education following the implementation of Universal Secondary Education USE in 2007 in Uganda. The government has, and continues to spend heavily on the USE programme, just like any other programme. It is however, not known what challenges are being faced in implementing the programme in rural areas which if not addressed, colossal sums of money may be lost. The focus of this study therefore was to try and find out the challenges being faced in the implementation of the public and private sector provision of USE in the rural areas, specifically in Busoga region.

The study was guided by one key objective of establishing the challenges being faced by the public and private sectors in implementing the Universal Primary Education programme in Busoga region. More specifically, the study sought to try and establish the challenges being faced by the public and private sectors in the implementation of the Universal Secondary Education programme in Busoga region.

## **Literature Review**

Following the successful launch of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme in 1997, the government of Uganda launched the Universal Secondary Education (USE) programme in 2007; 10 years later. The USE programme was aimed at absorbing the products of the UPE programme. It was intended to avail places for pupils who wanted to continue to secondary level after completion of the primary cycle of education. The Government further wanted to increase equitable access to quality secondary education as well as promoting relevancy, efficiency and effectiveness of secondary school education in the country.

It must be noted that one of the successes of the UPE programme was increase in enrollment (Ministry of Education and Sports 2004). At that time, Uganda became the first African country to launch USE, and according to the UN report, Africa had the worst secondary school enrollment in the whole world, with only 34% of secondary school going children actually in school (Kavuma 2011). He further observes that girls and children from poor background constitute the majority of those who were being locked out of school due to financial and other cultural constraints.

According to the government's arrangement, students who scored specific grades at Primary Leaving Examinations would study free in government-aided secondary schools and participating private schools. Government was expected to contribute Uganda shillings one hundred and forty one thousand (141,000/=) only per student per year. This was equivalent to about 40US\$ in December 2017. This is about Uganda shillings 47,000 per student per term. Parents and/or their children on the other hand were expected to provide school uniform, stationery and midday meals.

Available literature on USE in Uganda does not examine the challenges of implementing the programme in constrained areas like Busoga region. A study on teachers' "moonlighting" activities and another on the importance of involving headteachers in guiding policy on the programme revealed that the programme increased the number of engagements teachers take on for their personal financial gains thereby contributing to poor service delivery on their part (Huylebroeck & Titeca 2015). It is important to note that much as these studies offer important insights on specific dynamics regarding the USE programme, they fall short of showing the challenges of implementing the programme in constrained communities like Busoga region, which gap the current study sought to fill.

According to Kavuma (2011) the USE programme, just like the UPE programme faces several challenges stemming from inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructure all of which have impacted on academic performance of the products of the programme. These, however, are national and average occurrences which do not show particularly disparities in regions, districts or communities. Given the peculiarities alluded to about the Busoga region, it is not known what the picture is as far as the challenges in implementing the USE programme are and how they have affected educational provision hence the need to conduct the current study.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative approach although with some elements of quantification. The design adopted was cross-sectional survey design. This was deemed appropriate because the researchers needed to collect a lot of information from several respondents at the same time.

## **Study Population**

The target population included head teachers, teachers, district education officers, parents and pupils in the selected schools in the study area. These were deemed appropriate because they are directly involved in the USE programme implementation and therefore are conversant with the challenges being faced in its implementation.

## **Data Analysis**

Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. Quantitative data was analysed by computation of percentages and frequencies to enable synthesis and interpretation. On the other hand, qualitative data was analysed by coding and identification of themes and consequent interpretation.

## Findings of the Study

The respondents revealed that on the side of the government, there was inadequate funding for the programme; late release of funds and political interference in the programme. Specifically, 68% of the respondents revealed that the funds provided by the government to run the programme were inadequate. Head teachers indicated that the government allocates USE students any amount that the schools find on their bank accounts (73%). One of the head teachers put it this way:

*The government funding for the programme is so little that one cannot buy the necessary school inputs. As if that is not enough, the money comes late and suppliers overcharge us because we do not pay cash. A box of chalk which would ordinarily cost Shs.5,000 is sold to us at Shs.11,000 because we take as long as 6 months without paying. Policy indicates that each school is supposed to get facilitation according to the number of USE students they have but that is NOT the practice. You find any amount of money on the account and that is what you spend. Furthermore, before you spend you have to call a finance committee meeting, the members of which need facilitation; which further reduces on the amount available for school core activities.* (Response from one of the head teachers who participated in the study)

There was as well an indication that there is resistance from the political leaders in the study area towards the USE programme. Teachers and parents indicated that the area Members of Parliament who were in the opposition had resorted to negative propaganda about the programme purporting that learning was not taking place, schools lacked the necessary infrastructure for effective teaching and learning.

One of the parents interviewed put it this way:

*The Honourable has advised parents not to take their children to USE schools since such schools do not have furniture, blackboards, textbooks and do not provide meals to children. He said that the child of the poor rural peasants is at a disadvantage as the children of the government officials were in good private schools. This is discouraging many parents from taking their children to the USE schools yet they cannot afford the high costs of education in the good private schools.* (Response from one of the parents who participated in the study).

The study required participants to indicate availability of adequate infrastructure in the USE schools; availability of teachers and provision of requirements for disabled students. The following responses were received:

Availability of infrastructure like furniture, blackboards, chald and blackboard dusters, textbooks, and wall maps. The researchers singled out these as key inputs in the teaching/learning activity. Participating schools were required to indicate availability of these in their schools. The study revealed that there wasn't enough infrastructure in almost all participating schools. One teacher put it this way:

*Furniture is not enough for the available students in Senior One North. Teaching such a class is tantamount to addressing an academic rally. The majority of the students attend while standing. They cannot write notes. Under such circumstances, learning cannot take place. It is worse when you require students to draw a map, a diagram or a study a chart that is displayed at the front of the class. Classroom management as well becomes a challenge with such big classes.* (Response from one of the teachers interviewed).

Availability of enough teachers: Most of the head teachers and teachers indicated that USE schools lacked enough teachers. Head teachers indicated that they were overwhelmed by numbers such that the available teachers could not handle. This had led to a high teacher: student ratio hence affecting teaching and learning. One seemingly disappointed head teacher had this to say:



*The Government put a ban on recruitment of teachers yet implemented USE which brought in many more students. This is really controversial; whom do they expect to attend to such big numbers in class. If there was money one would employ teachers locally and pay them from students' tuition but this is USE where parents do not accept to make any financial contribution to school.*

Availability of teachers for disabled students: All the head teachers interviewed were disappointed by the Government's failure to provide teachers for disabled students. They not were concerned that the UPE programme had boosted the education of children with disabilities, which phenomenon had reached the secondary school level. However, the Government had not made efforts to train teachers specifically to handle students with disabilities. Furthermore, even the students themselves had not been availed facilities like brail machines, wheel chairs, guides for the learners and other facilities.

The parents were equally dismayed by the lack of facilitation for the children with disabilities on the part of the government. One parent indicated that:

*The government did not meet its promise on USE. The lame and blind children are not benefitting from the programme because they lack the necessary facilities. We parents are poor we cannot afford such things so how do they expect the disabled children to attend school.* (Response from one of the parents who participated in the study).

Finally the study revealed that there was limited cooperation from the parents; too many students compared to the available infrastructure; high dropout rates; and student absenteeism especially during planting and harvesting. As regards cooperation, the teachers and head teachers were concerned that parents were not as cooperative as they were expected. Among others the teachers were concerned that parents were not providing the necessary scholarstic materials like textbooks, stationery and the support to the USE children at home like transport to and from school. This was rendering the performance of the programme substandard according to the teachers interviewed. Furthermore several schools were overwhelmed by numbers. Schools had recruited many more students than the available infrastructure could support hence leading to congestion in the classrooms and several other facilities within the schools. There was as well outcry about the high dropout rates in the USE schools. When pressed for the major causes of the occurrence, respondents singled out lack of school requirements among the students; distance from home to school which students had to walk; irregular attendance on the part of the students especially during planting and harvesting seasons. One of the students interviewed explained as follows:

*My father allocated me a whole garden of 5 acreas of rice. During planting I work with him to plant rice. However it is worse when the rice grows because I spend the whole day in the garden to chase away birds and rats which eat the rice. I can spend about a month at home attending to the rice. After harvesting we take the rice to the machines and thereafter sell it to the buyers. I have to do such activities to get money.* (Interview with one of the students in Bugeywa village, Kamuli District).

### **Discussion of the Study Findings**

The study findings attest to the educational as well as pure economists' view that programmes put in place to address the plight of the poor do not actually do so. Furthermore, education in the above sense is benefitting the rich at the expense of the poor. As the children of the poor go to such poorly facilitated schools, their counterparts from rich families are going to the good schools, the likes of Kings College Buddo, St Mary's College Kitende, Gayaza High School, Mt Mary's Namagunga to mention just a few. Such children are more likely to perform well and get admitted to University under government sponsorship hence study using public funds. In this sense education is worsening the gap between the rich and the poor by making the rich richer and the poor poorer;

similar to the Biblical saying that he who has, more will be added while for the poor even the little he has will be taken away.

The study findings reveal that the government was probably not yet ready to implement the USE programme, just like the case with UPE programme. The necessary infrastructure was not in place by the time the USE programme was implemented hence the challenges being faced in the implementation of the programme. The challenges faced at the initial implementation of the programme have persisted, more than 10years since the programme inception. As regards the theoretical basis of the study, the study findings attest to the educational economists' view that education does not necessarily serve to give its products skills but it is simply a selection mechanism to determine who does what.

### **Conclusion**

The study revealed several challenges being faced by schools; in particular head teachers, teachers, students and parents as far as implementation of the USE programme is concerned.

### **Recommendation**

The Government of Uganda should provide the necessary infrastructure required for smooth running of the USE programme. Similarly the parents need to be sensitized about the need to meet their obligations to ensure smooth running of the USE programme.

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