The Political Economy of the Education Sector Policy Reform in Uganda

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Abstract:
The need for an analysis of why policy implementation in Uganda’s Education System has arguably failed is self evident. Much was promised since colonialism which unleashed a plethora of initiatives and much has undoubtedly been achieved. But many challenges still remain, not least, the growing realization that policy, however well founded, must be translated into outcomes. Rhetoric is no substitute for addressing realities that must accompany meaningful education policy reform in Uganda. This paper attempts to provide a detailed analysis of the education reform process in Uganda using a political economy perspective and tries to provide some answers as to why challenges of implementation still remain. The need to build consensus, share ownership, allocate resources, clarify accountability and evaluate progress are some of the necessary pre-requisites that will have to be put in place to ensure effective education policy implementation reform in Uganda.

1. Background:
National goals and objectives of education
Since independence in 1962, there have been several attempts at reform in the education sector in Uganda. The 1989 Education Policy Review Commission Report (EPRC) titled “Education for National Integration and Development” laid the foundation for education reform over the last 30 years. Cognizant of the needs of Ugandans, problems inherent in the education system since independence, and the constraints emanating from the social, political, and economic dynamics of the era, the authors clearly identified that Uganda “needs an education which is techno-scientific to promote not only national integrity and
unity but also the acquisition of practical/vocational and managerial skills which will enhance the productive capacities of Ugandans for national development” (EPRC Report, 1989, 14). Consequently, the authors of the Report also identified seven national goals to guide the development of Uganda as contained in several policy documents: i) forging national unity and harmony; ii) evolving democratic institutions and practices in society; iii) guaranteeing fundamental human rights; iv) creating national wealth; v) creating upholding and maintenance of national independence and patriotic feeling; vi) promoting moral and ethical values; and vii) promoting a feeling of humanitarianism and cooperation.

The aims of education in Uganda are contained in the EPRC Report of 1989 and the 1992 Government White Paper on Education are:

i) To promote understanding and appreciation of the value of national unity, patriotism, and cultural heritage, with due consideration of international relations and beneficial inter-dependence;

ii) To inculcate moral, ethical, and spiritual values in the individual and to develop self-discipline, integrity, tolerance, and human fellowship;

iii) To inculcate a sense of service, duty, and leadership for participation in civic, social, and national affairs through group activities in educational institutions and the community;

iv) To promote scientific, technical, and cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to promote development;

v) To eradicate illiteracy and equip the individual with basic skills and knowledge to exploit the environment for self-development as well as national development, for better health, nutrition, and family life, and the capability for continued learning;

vi) To contribute to the building of an integrated, self-sustaining and independent national economy;

These aforementioned national goals and aims have served the country well through political and economic transition from the turbulent times. At the time the EPRC report and the White Paper were drafted, the obtaining situation at the moment was political and economic recovery and the goals clearly point to national integration and economic independence. Although we cannot say that Uganda has attained both goals, it is time to shift the goals of education towards those which may better propel the nation to the future. With globalization and continued decimation of geographic border lines, Uganda’s education system should yield candidates who are able to compete favorably in a global economy.

**Brief history of education in Uganda**

During the pre-colonial and pre-missionary era in Uganda, there was no formal education and indigenous learning was mainly aimed at inculcating morals and virtues such that children would grow up to promote harmony in societies, promote cultural heritage, develop character and respect for elders, and learn to be self sufficient and productive citizens\(^1\). Learning during that period was done through folk tales, songs, storytelling, observation, and instruction by peers and elders.

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\(^1\) Muyanda-Mutebi (1996)
Prior to colonization, protestant and catholic missionaries who had been sent to spread Christianity among the indigenous peoples of the country were the harbingers of formal education. These missionaries established schools as early as 1901. The first schools were attended by children of chiefs and other people who collaborated with the imperialists after Uganda became a British protectorate in 1894. In the early stages of formal education in Uganda, schools were classified as follows:

i) Subgrade schools which were equivalent to primary two and were intended to prepare pupils to attain a level of literacy before baptism

ii) Maternity and midwifery schools that would prepare midwives for the profession

iii) Central schools which were equivalent to primary four and were aimed at providing basic elementary education

iv) High schools which were equivalent to primary seven but largely segregated based on gender as boys had a superior curriculum that prepared for colleges and girls were prepared to be home makers

v) Normal school were similar to teachers’ colleges and were aimed at producing teaching staff for high schools

vi) Colleges were taught in the English language and aimed at producing clerks, traders, entrepreneurs, and chiefs

**Early Reforms (Pre-Independence):**

During the colonial era, there was general outcry that the education system did not suit the needs of indigenous Ugandans as it produced a class of educated missionaries who were eager to embrace the western culture and abandon the Ugandan tradition. Several attempts were made to review the education system and recommend ways to reform this system and to make it more accommodating than alienating. Several commissions and committees that were mandated to review the system included the following:

- The Phelps-Stockes Commission of 1924
- The Earl de la Warr Committee of 1935
• The Thomas Education Committee of 1940
• The Binns Commission of 1951
• The de Bunsen Commission of 1952
• The Binns Study Group of 1957

Even at an early stage in the development of formal education, the system was inadequate and had little to no ‘protectorate government oversight’. The syllabus segregated based on gender, which exacerbated gender inequalities. Following the Phelps-Stockes Commission of 1924 recommendation, the education system was re-classified and the 1927 Education Ordinance was adopted. Inter alia, according to this ordinance government would have oversight over schools. In 1934 the Earl de la Warr Commission which had been tasked with examining the state of Makerere College recommended that primary education should be expanded and girl-child education be developed and given priority. In the 1950s, government delegated the administration of primary and junior secondary schools to the districts and kingdom authorities (see report of the EPRC 1989).

Post-Independence Reforms (Up to 1987):

Shortly before independence, the Binns Study Group of 1957 had been commissioned to study the education systems of British colonies in East Africa and recommend as to how to increase enrollment in schools and improve the education systems. After independence, attempts were made to improve the Ugandan education system and make it more suited to the needs of Ugandans and the development of the newly independent country.

• The Castle Education Commission of 1963 was set up and tasked to study the content and structure of the education system. The Castle Commission recommended emphasis on science and technical education, review of the syllabus, re-organization of primary and junior secondary schools, and teacher training.
• The 1964 Education Act
• The 1965 Primary School Curriculum (National Curriculum Development Center was by Ministry of Education decree in 1973)
• The 1970 University Act
• The 1977 Education Policy Review Commission under the chairmanship of Prof. Senteza Kajubi was appointed but the Liberation war of 1978/79 disrupted proceedings so the commission’s findings and recommendations were not disseminated and implemented.
• The 1987 Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) (the report of the commission famously known as the Ssenteza Kajubi report was published in 1989) and is the precursor for the 1992 Government White Paper on Education

_The crises that necessitated reform_

The education sector in Uganda suffered many crises following decades of political turmoil and instability during the 1970s and 1980s. Such crises as poor enrollment rates, high dropout rates, low completion and graduation rates, under staffing, poor management, lack of scholastic materials, inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and achievement gaps based on geographical location created an impetus for reform. The EPRC report of 1989 noted several other weaknesses of Uganda’s education system at the time: increasing demand for secondary education amidst a limited number of schools; the relevance of school curricular to the needs of society; the deterioration of the quality of graduates; high costs of education at higher levels; government funding for higher education which tilts plane in favor of children from higher income families, thus exacerbating income inequality; bureaucratic encumbrances hindering planning and development of education according to local needs; decline in motivation and morale for the teaching staff; and teaching and learning processes geared to passing examinations.

When the NRM government came to power in 1986, reform in the education sector was considered of utmost importance as part of rebuilding the country and setting the country
on a path to development. As part of the NRM’s ten point programme, education was given attention under point number six: restoration of social services and rehabilitation of war ravaged areas. As far as literacy was concerned, the framers of the ten point programme believed that there was “enough form 6 [Advanced level], form 4 [Ordinary level], and primary 7 leavers to wipe out illiteracy in Uganda and to be used in ensuring universal primary education for everybody and ultimately, universal secondary education ….” In 1987, the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) headed by Professor Ssenteza Kajubi was sanctioned to review education sector policies. This commission was to recommend strategies that would: equip students with marketable skills, reformulate the general objectives of schools at each level, integrate the academic with commercial and technical subjects, reassess school financing, review the role of examinations and methods of assessment, and evaluate the role of the private sector in education. The commission’s report was released in 1989, and following this report, the government of Uganda issued the Government White Paper of 1992 which laid the foundation for education reform.

In the 1992 White Paper on the Education Policy Review Report of 1989, government acknowledges the importance of education in the transformation of society. However, the Government also notes the challenge in financing improvements in the education system due to competition from other sectors of the economy such as industry and agriculture.

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2 The Ten Point Programme was a proposal that formed the basis for political and social mobilization towards rehabilitation of Uganda after several years of turmoil.

3 Professor Ssenteza Kajubi was an educationist and served as a two-term vice chancellor of Makerere University during Amin’s regime from 1977-1979 and under the Museveni government from 1990-1993. He served as director of the National Institute of Education at Makerere from 1964 to 1967. He was made professor of higher education at Makerere in 1969. From 1986 to 1989 he was the principal of Institute of Teacher Education, Kyambogo. In 1963, he was a member of the education policy commission, and chaired another education review commission in 1977-1978 whose findings were not published due to the deposition of Idi Amin. In 1994, he was part of the team that founded Nkumba University, and served as the vice chancellor for 14 years.

4 The 1992 White Paper is still the basis for policy in education on which the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2007-2015 is based.
and transport combined with inadequate economic indicators at the time such as the shrinking value of exports.

Noteworthy, the reforms were not isolated initiatives germane to Uganda; there was external influence from the international donor community, the wave of globalization, and other international treaties and conventions. Globalization for example affected education reform policy, structure, and practice. The driving forces of economic, political, technological, and cultural globalization led to more openness, interconnectedness, and competition between countries for skilled labor force (Wood, 2008). The international donor community and international treaties and conventions on education played both direct and indirect roles. The donor community under the auspices of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) through their Structural Adjustment Programs of the 1980s and 1990s urged developing countries’ governments to reduce government expenditures in order to achieve macro-economic stability. As part of reduced government expenditures, education budgets suffered cuts as more liberalization and the privatization of education sector were favored. The neo-liberalist agenda legitimized less of a government role in education through decentralization and privatization approaches. These approaches were touted to be more efficient, accountable, and responsive to local community needs, empowering teachers and students, increasing education quality, and increasing funds available for education (Astiz et. al, 2002). Other international treaties and conventions such as Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals stipulated global commitments to education which in turn catalyzed education reform in many developing countries.

2. The Reforms Post 1986 – Responses to the Crises

The major reforms that were undertaken following the publication of the 1992 Government White Paper were mainly policy and legal framework reforms. The purpose
of reform was to improve access to education, equity in education, and the quality of education. The following laws were put in place as basis for reform:

- The 1995 Uganda Constitution – stipulated the right of every citizen to education and also outlined the role of government in providing education. It should be noted that the right to education is universally recognized as a human right embedded in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966). The right to education includes the right to free, compulsory primary education for all, an obligation to avail secondary education to all, and to develop equitable access to higher education.

- The Local Government Act of 1997 – devolved education at the primary, secondary, trade, special education, and technical education to local governments. According to the Act, district councils are to regulate, control, manage, administer, promote, license, and support the establishment and maintenance of schools. This devolution of services to the local governments is embedded in the national framework of decentralization.

- The Teacher Development Management Systems (TDMS) of 1998 – was aimed at reforming primary education with specific goals: to revitalize education management for both school administrators and local association heads; to reform teacher education institutions and credentialing; to provide continued in-service training to both untrained and trained teachers; and to establish and coordinate teacher training centers across the country.

- Revised School Management Committee Regulations of 2000 – school management committees (SMCs) are the governing bodies of the primary education sector. SMCs came into effect under Statutory Instrument NO. 228 of 1964, were amended under Statutory Instrument No. 244 of 1969, and the regulations were revised again in 2000. The regulations give the SMCs the
mandate to manage schools and monitor budgets, as well as act as links between schools and the communities.

- University and Tertiary Institutions Act of 2001 (amended in 2003 and 2006) – by this act, the government established the National Council for Higher Education which regulates the establishment and management of institutions of higher education.

- The Education Act, 2008 – this Act stipulates government’s policy on the provision of education and training, the responsibilities of stakeholders, licensing of teachers, the control and management of schools, and the quality control of education.

- The Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) Act of 2008 – the Act provides the legal and institutional framework for BTVET programs and roles of different providers. It formalizes reforms in the subsector by introducing and promoting modular flexible modular training which suits trainees occupational or skills requirements; introducing certification based on a vocational qualification framework; recognizing prior formal and non-formal training under the Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework.

2.1 The nature and implementation of the reforms

The nature of these reforms was mainly a top-down approach as they were devised at the central government or the ministerial level. There was limited community consultation although the community at large was expected to embrace the reforms and be part of the implementation process. For example, with establishment of school management committees, the role of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) was undermined and currently PTAs are not as active as they have been previously. In fact, when the 1992 Government White Paper was signed off by the then Minister of Education and Sports, the minister was presenting the paper for public debate at both the local and national levels before final implementation. What would have come out of the consultations and
debates, the minister had hoped that, it would “truly reflect the Nation’s views on the education of its citizens”\(^5\). Although the GWPE is not the official policy in education in Uganda, it is the basis for policy. If it had been subjected to public debates, the inputs from the public and stakeholders would have engineered an buy-in and ownership for reform, which is critical for implementation and accountability.

### 2.2 Decentralization of education (was power devolved to lower governments?)

Uganda’s decentralization policy is enshrined in article 172 (2) of the 1995 Constitution and the 1997 Local Government Act (LGA) sections 96 and 97. Also, the sectoral strategic plans for the Ministry of education support concerted efforts to fully decentralize the services. “The Ministry has been moving toward decentralization of primary and post-primary education since 1995. Progress varies among districts, though few have made a start at the post-primary level”\(^6\). By the 1997 LGA, education services covering nursery, primary, secondary, trade, special education, and technical education were devolved to the local governments, but in some local governments/districts there are non-existent governance structure to effect the decentralization policy.

Part of successful decentralization policy is to ensure adequate financing of services at the local level, partly by establishing a reliable source of revenue. With service delivery decentralization, was supposed to be fiscal decentralization. Statistics from the Budget Performance Reports from 2007/08 – 2010/11 show that there has been no non-wage expenditure at the local government in the secondary education sub-section which gives evidence of no financing for education services delivery.

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\(^6\) Education Sector Strategic Plan 2004-2015; and the Revised Education Sector Strategic Plan 2007-2015
There are several concerns with fiscal decentralization, for example, lack of information and transparency in the budgeting process: local governments do not know what they should be getting and when it should come. Even the information contained in the available budget document is very technical and difficult to comprehend for officials at the local governments. Additionally, lack of fiscal oversight and accountability means that there is no office or institution tracking the money. The budgeting process is largely lacking in terms of planning such that national priorities may significantly differ from local district priorities which creates disharmony in goals. Ultimately, for fiscal decentralization to happen and enhance local service delivery, there is need to create pressure from the demand side at the grassroots to push for standards, oversight, and effective service delivery.

2.3 Progress or regression in the sector since the reforms – Achievements and Failures
The reform efforts undertaken in the education sector over the last twenty years following the Government White Paper have registered both achievements and failures. As already mentioned, the purposes of the reforms were to improve access to education, make education equitable, and improve the quality of education services. The government has laid out strategies and interventions to achieve the objectives of reform in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2010/11 – 2014/15 (see pages 219-231).

i) Access to Education
The strategies that the government has put in place to increase access to education are to reduce costs of education to families; and expand and improve primary, secondary and BTVET infrastructural facilities.
Under these strategies, the interventions planned to expand access include: continued implementation of UPE and USE; adopt and implement a differentiated allocation formula for capitation grants to schools that takes into consideration school and community differences; repair school facilities and expand and improve classrooms; and
in the BTVET sub-sector modularize BTVET courses to optimize use of training facilities. UPE and USE have been the main shocks in the education sector in the last 20 years with regards to increasing access.

*Universal Primary Education (UPE):*

UPE had been recommended by the EPRC report of 1989 and had been endorsed by the GWPE of 1992; “Government agrees that the universalization of primary education would lead to the eventual alleviation of poverty, disease, disharmony, degradation, and ignorance” (GWPE, 1992, 15). By 1999, Uganda had made big strides in enrollment numbers following the ‘big bang’ approach to the universalization of primary education in 1997. Enrollment rates had doubled from 3.4 million pupils in 1996 to 6.9 million in 2001 (World Bank, 2002). Some aspects that went right in the universalization of primary education according to the World Bank were: political commitment from the government; establishment of inclusive effective domestic and international partnerships that facilitated implementation; measures to improve transparency and accountability; collaboration and support from external funding agencies; and sound macroeconomic policies at the time, which fostered expansion of the education system. However, there have been unintended consequences that have significantly dogged the primary education system: deterioration in the quantitative inputs such as teacher pupil ratios, textbook pupil ratios, and classroom crowding. The quality of teachers is still lacking also due to significant increases in enrollments that training of teachers has been unable to cope with. Dropout rates are still high, even with the automatic promotion policy in place. Furthermore, the quality of education has been compromised a great deal as achievement levels in basic numeracy and literacy skills are lacking.

*Universal Secondary Education (USE)*

Launched in 2007, although implementation did not start until 2009, USE is part of the government’s program called Universal Post Primary Education and Training (UPPET).
The goal of UPPET is to absorb the increasing number of students completing primary school that would otherwise not afford post primary education; in essence UPPET has expanded access to secondary education through USE. With the launch of USE, enrollment rates increased from 160,000 students in 2007 to 452,000 in 2009; transition rates from primary school to post primary increased from 69 percent in 2007 to 74 percent in 2010 (World Bank, 2010). It is still too early to evaluate the demerits of USE, but there is general consensus that the challenges that have dogged UPE encumber USE as well.

ii) Equity of Education:
The policy equity in education has mainly hinged on gender balance and special needs childrens’ access to education. On ensuring equity in education, the government supports programs that are targeted at disadvantaged children, children with special needs and the youth; reducing social-cultural barriers to girls’ attendance in order to reduce gender disparity, and targeting grants to schools and institutions in needy areas. Among the interventions to achieve the goal of equity in education, government would: collaborate with NGOs to implement projects for disadvantaged children, special needs children, and the youth; train more special needs education teachers; give allowances and incentives for teachers who teach and stay in hard to reach or conflict areas; establish regulation to protect girls and boys from sexual harassment in schools; and implement targeted bursary schemes for girls and students with special needs. The district quota system of university admission was an initiative to ensure regional equity and representation in higher education. The problem with these affirmative action policies that have aimed at increasing equity is that they have loopholes that end up abetting inequity they are supposed to address. For example, the district quota system has major flaws that make it liable to fraud. There are reported cases of students from one district being admitted on a quota of another district. There are no clear guidelines on whether students should be admitted on quotas from districts where they originally come from (extended family
origins and upcountry home) or where they currently live, or where they went to school. Case in point: a student may have extended family origins in Kanungu district, but his family currently lives in Wakiso district, and he went to school in Mbale district; for which district quota intake would such a person qualify?

**iii) Quality of Education**
To improve the quality and relevance of education, the government of Uganda has proposed several strategies which are discussed below. The government has suggested enhancing instructional quality to increase pupils’ achievement of literacy, numeracy, and basic life skills by decongesting classrooms, intensifying the use of local language as the medium of instruction in P1-P3, implementing a thematic curriculum and continuous assessment. It has also proposed strengthening the teaching force through accelerated recruitment of qualified teachers, regular review of teacher education curriculum, appointment of mentor teachers, improvement of working conditions, and recruiting additional tutors to meet the requirements of growing enrolment. Establishing centers of excellence with fully furnished libraries and ICT laboratories and relevant instructional materials has also been proposed. Other suggestions include reconfiguring the BTVET sub-sector; strengthening intra and inter-sectoral linkages; and implementing efficiency measures to deliver BTVET programs for example by encouraging private providers and communities to offer skills training courses.

**3. The political context of reform**
“Political economy begins with the nature of decision making and is concerned with how politics will affect economic choices in a society” Lionel Robbins (1932). Cognizant of the ubiquity of conflict of interest in political settings, how societies achieve collective choice is of importance. In democracies, the question that can be asked is how the masses

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7 Essay on the nature and significance of economic science
gain authority to influence economic choices and policies that reflect their collective interests. Political economists contend that choices and policies that are implemented are not always the optimal choices given the interplay between political and economic constraints. The lack of fit between education policy and education practice in most developing countries is often explained in terms of lack of resources, the legacy of inequality and the dearth of capacity to translate official vision into contextual reality (Jonathan Jansen 2001, Hartshorne, Ken. 1999 & Sayed, Yusuf. 2001), yet the influence of politics is arguably the most detrimental.

This section explores how political interests and constraints explain the dismal attempts at education reform in post-independence Uganda with particular attention to policy choices in the past 25 years since the NRM government came to power. The section explains how political transition from a single party system to a multi-party system of democracy enhanced education reform in Uganda.

At the time of the EPRC in 1987, the state of Uganda’s economy could be described as fragile although there was good will for political and economic recovery and rebuilding both at home and in the international community. The ascension of the NRM government to power in 1986 ended years of political turmoil and instability. Uganda became a one-party state until 1996 when competitive elections were established, although multi-parties were not allowed to openly compete until 2001. The 1990s was a period that was punctuated by a wave of democracy on the African continent evidenced by multiparty elections. This was partly a result of conditionalities the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) sanctioned by international donors such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This wave of democracy had been the dominant spirit at the time, following the end of communism in Eastern Europe and the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Many African countries undertook political reforms during this period toward
democratic governance. Uganda was among those countries that transitioned to electoral democracy in 1996, although still under a one-party state.

In discussing democracy and the politics of reform, governance cannot be divorced from the discourse. As defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Leftwich (1993, 661) defines governance as “the formal institutional structure and location of authoritative decision making in the modern state”. These decisions may define expectations, for example, through political participation, may grant power through political action, and verify or judge performance through political behavior. In political units, politics provides a means through which governance operates. Governance therefore, provides a means through which governments are selected, monitored and replaced.

3.1 The Role of Information and Rational Ignorance:
The role of information in political decisions cannot be underestimated. Depending on whether voters are sufficiently informed, casually informed, or ill-informed will fundamentally determine political outcomes. To be sufficiently informed means that the voter vigorously engages in information finding activities to credibly educate his or herself about political programs and has the intellectual ability to retain and interpret the information. To be casually informed means that the voter only has access to information through public media such as radios and puts intellectual effort in remembering the information. The difference between a sufficiently informed voter and a casually informed voter is that the latter does not consciously look for information, but rather information finds him through a regularly available source. To be ill-informed is to be in a state where the voter completely lacks information.
Information plays a significant role in elective democracy because the availability of or lack of, could potentially tilt the electoral plane. Gordon Tullock⁸, in his seminal work on political ignorance argues that voters change their political positions from election to election because of ill-information and the cost of acquiring information. He advances a model of “rational ignorance” where he assumes that when considering political issues, individuals make an estimate of the likely effect on them of a government decision and the cost of acquiring information to enlighten themselves to take appropriate action. The implication of rational ignorance is that politicians choose programs which have a public appeal but are complex enough that the cost of acquiring information by a rational voter is greater than the perceived benefit. The complexity of the program and the information costs involved favor the politician because he or she is able to win votes by generalizing the benefits of the proposed program. At the time UPE was announced in 1996, most voters could be said to have been casually or ill-informed about the program. This gave President Museveni; the NRM candidate at the time, an opportunity to articulate the generalized benefit of the program i.e. abolition of school fees, which appealed to a majority of the populace. Although at that time there might have been information about the ills of universal education that are apparent now, it would have been extremely costly for an individual voter to engage in gathering information to educate him or herself and make an informed voting choice. The implication of the voter’s ill-information is relevant in that the voter may not understand the benefit proportion of the program and may also be overlooking the program’s long term effects. In the 1996 elections, ill-information therefore tilted the electoral plane in favor of the NRM candidate.

3.2 Governance, Politics and the Universalization of Education:
The features of governance such as democracy, economic freedom, political freedom, and level of corruption, are theorized to have had an influence on Uganda government’s

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⁸ See The Economics of Politics in The Selected Works of Gordon Tullock, Volume 4; Liberty Fund
decision to universalize education. In addition, population characteristics such as percent of the population that is rural, percent of population poor, percent of population that is below 14 years of age, and HIV/AIDS prevalence rate are hypothesized to have a strong relationship to the government’s decision to adopt universal education. Furthermore, foreign aid donors and development agencies are believed to have a major say in policies adopted by developing countries in general, and the education sector in Uganda in particular.

Using a game theory model with time-series, cross-sectional data from African countries, Stasavage (2005) finds that democracy and the need to obtain electoral votes matter for education budgets. He infers that democratically-elected governments may have a greater incentive than autocrats to provide public services for the population as a whole, and argues that they place a higher priority on those services demanded by a majority of the population. This is based on the assumption that “governments in political systems with competitive elections face fundamentally different threats to their rule when compared to autocratic governments” (344). This is an indicator of government acting in its own votes maximizing interest. Avenstrup et al. (2004, 9) in their four-country\(^9\) case study of UPE conclude that “in all four countries, the adoption of free primary education was triggered by political demand rather than by rational planning process”.

Olson (1993) in his study about dictatorship, democracy, and development simplifies democracy to a situation in which two candidates seek the presidency or two parties seek to form the government. He intimates that this simplified form of democracy gives democracy an encompassing interest to provide public goods. The larger the stake in society, he argues, the greater the incentive. As has been argued, democracy is a major impetus for growth and human capital development. In addition, democratic governments

\(^9\) The four countries in the analysis are Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, and Uganda. Malawi was the first country to adopt UPE in 1991. Uganda was the first country to adopt USE.
tend to be more responsive owing to the ability of opposition parties to keep them in check through competition. Olson (1993, 571) argues that “democratic political competition does not give the leader of the government the incentive that an autocrat has to extract the maximum attainable social surplus from the society to achieve personal objectives”. Furthermore, democratic governments are more likely to have functioning institutions already in place which help to ensure the rule of law, protection of personal liberties, and encourage a conducive environment for investments and economic development. To this effect, the nature of democracy, the level of economic freedom, political freedom, and corruption levels in a country determine the extent to which a government will commit to provision of public goods. In the case of Universalization of education in Uganda, there are major implications with regards to policy, development, and the population’s economic well-being.

Stasavage (2005b), in his paper on the role of democracy in Uganda’s move to universal primary education, contends that “if the risk of being voted out of office is real, then one can expect democratically-elected governments to choose policies that are designed to satisfy an electoral majority” (56) of which education may be one. Conceivably, what the government is trying to achieve with Universalization of education is not to manifest passion for literacy but rather to rationally maximize its utility given what we know for example about the performance of UPE and the demand of free education by the poor in Africa, in general and Uganda in particular. Governments and policymakers often times propose symbolic policies based on the desire to be perceived as connected and responsive to the needs of the population. To this end, the impact of the policy and poor performance of the program are not necessarily important considerations for policymakers. African governments are especially wont to enact such symbolic policies.

Jansen (2001) also, in reference to South Africa’s Education reform process argues and rightly so that “every single case of education policy in South Africa demonstrates in
different ways, the pre-occupation of the state with setting policy struggles in the political domain rather than the realm of practice (pg. 271). Similarly, in the case of Uganda, the making of education policy can arguably best be described as a struggle for the achievement of broad political symbolism to establish political credentials for the ruling NRM government especially since most of the education policies enacted have tended to be announced towards election periods.

We can infer, therefore, that the move to announce UPE by President Museveni during the first competitive elections of his rule as president in 1996\textsuperscript{10} was induced by anticipation of political gain rather than concerns of access to and equity of education. A form of political opportunism. This notion is corroborated by the fact that although universal education had been on the NRM’s ten point programme of 1986, had been recommended by the Ssenteza Kajubi report of 1989, and had even been promised by the 1992 White Paper to start in 1992/1993, there had been no development to that effect until 1996, when for the first time in his presidency, President Museveni sensed a threat of defeat in open competitive elections. In fact, other relevant sources note that universal education had not been a welcome idea to the government because of what would be a significant increase in government expenditures in education compared to other sectors such as roads and security that were considered more productive (see for example Stasavage, 2005). Additionally, in his 2001 election manifesto, Kibirige Mayanja (JEEMA) accuses president Museveni of copying his idea of UPE five years earlier and turning the system into a substandard one (page 11).

“Subsequent to the 1996, President Museveni’s own advisors directly suggested that their strong electoral showing was attributable in part to the pledge to abolish primary school

\textsuperscript{10} Although Uganda was still a one-party state in 1996, there was establishment of competitive elections that year. The contenders for the presidency were Paul Kawanga Ssemwogerere of the Democratic Party (DP) and Muhammad Mayanja Kibirige of the Justice Economy Education Morals African Unity (JEEMA).
fees” (Stasavage, 2005, 60). Building on the political capital accumulated by the introduction of UPE, USE was pledged during the 2006 elections when Kiiza Besigye of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) posed a real threat of defeat to the presidency. By 2006, the ratings for government in regard to free education were favorable among the rural population in spite of the failures of the system such as poor quality education, overcrowding of classrooms, and inadequate funding. Also, USE was introduced to absorb pupils from UPE who did not meritoriously qualify to join secondary schools. To further elaborate the ad hoc nature of policy choices in education, at the time USE was announced, there was no clear investment plan to fund the reform. The Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) which was operational at the time covered a ten year period from 2004 – 2015. In 2007, the plan was revised to cover USE in the Revised Education Sector Strategic Plan 2007 – 2015. Education remains a salient issue for government because of the expected return on education investment and its role in economic and human capital development. Universal education provides relief to millions of people who would not otherwise be able to afford any education at all. In this way, it is considered a fair means of redistribution creating incentives for a majority of Ugandans to participate in political processes.

The components of universal education abridge the link between actions of the Government of Uganda as an agent of the citizens of Uganda and for multinational development agencies which over the past two decades have amplified the fight against poverty and illiteracy through such programs as Millennium Development Goals, Structural Adjustment Programs, and Human Development Indicators improvement. Because Uganda’s budget is partially funded by the international donor community, universalization of education has enabled the government to sustain foreign funding.

Although the Uganda government may have a compelling interest to provide free education in rural constituencies, there is probably greater demand on the government
from development agencies and other foreign aid donor agencies to provide free education. As a country that is highly reliant on foreign aid, Uganda is beholden to follow through on serving the donors interests. Education for All programs backed by UNESCO which aim at expanding early childhood care and education, and providing free and compulsory primary education for all children by 2015 create inducements for third world countries even when operationalization and sustainability of such programs is questionable.

Education spending is especially essential for the Ugandan government because of the great divide between school enrollment in rural and urban areas. Rural Uganda is predominantly agrarian and poor. Primary education is a major concern for rural Africa because it is most likely the only level of education that rural dwellers receive (Stasavage, 2005b). The cost of education constitutes a significant obstacle to school attendance by the poor. In fact, Deininger (2003) found this to be true while evaluating the cost of school on enrollment by the poor, using UPE in Uganda as a case study. He found that in the first year of UPE implementation, attendance by 6-12 year old children from poor households had increased from 46 percent to 78 percent owing to the abolition of school fees.

In developing countries, reliance on foreign aid as a major proportion of budgets and for such developmental programs has its ills: aid reduces democratic accountability, engenders moral hazard and corruption, encourages soft budgeting constraints which enable fiscal irresponsibility and facilitates institutional destruction (Brautigam & Knack, 2004). All of these outcomes would be alleviated if these governments liberalized markets, built political stability and created enabling environments for entrepreneurship and economic freedom to flourish. Implicitly, the Uganda government alleges development of institutions, but the mechanisms of accountability that would emerge from functional institutions would pose threats of regime change. Thus, the country is
stuck with mediocre institutions as the education system produces graduates who lack innovative skills to build themselves and the nation. As the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) (2004-2015, 1) concedes, Uganda “does not have enough men and women with the competencies needed to achieve its development goals. Yet the anticipated rate of economic growth (GDP) is not enough to expand the education system over the next ten years to meet the demands of a rapidly growing school-age population”.

4. Macro- and Micro-Political Issues

4.1 Financing the reforms

One of the major contradictions in education reform is financing: how exactly should meager resources be allocated to what activity and based on what criteria? The framers of the reform hardly ever synchronize their targets with those who draft budgets. Although the budget for education in Uganda has increased nominally over the last few years, in real terms there have not been significant increases. Moreover, the incremental nature of the budgeting process does not allow room for “special financing” during the drafting and implementation of reforms. Additionally, a significant portion of the budget goes to recurrent and not developmental activities.

The Education Act of 2008 stipulates that “financing of education shall be through fees, grants, donations, training levies, education tax, and any other means as deemed appropriate by government” (10). With UPE and USE, government abolished school fees and government has since mainly supported schools through capitation grants and school facilitation grants (SFGs) which take into account school differences based on population and the economic base of the area (ESSP, 2004-2015). With the SFGs government enables schools to expand classrooms, build teacher houses, and other facilities needed to improve hygiene and children safety.
Sources of finances for education reform have been government and international donors through budget support and programmatic funding. Because funds for budget support are channeled directly into the national treasury, budget support funds are difficult to track with regards to sectoral outputs and outcomes. The Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) was engineered within the framework of the Education Strategic Investment Plan (ESIP) of 1998 – 2003 was partly to address funding problems for reform. “The Education SWAp in Uganda fostered greater attention on budget performance, intra-sectoral linkages, outcomes, and service quality by giving greater weight to improving policy, budgetary and institutional framework for effective government-funding agency partnership, including enhanced national leadership and ownership of reform plans …” (Penny et al. 2008, 270)

The economic crisis and the recent suspension of donor funds over the corruption scandals in Uganda imply that funds for budget support will undoubtedly shrink. The question that remains is: how do we achieve sustainable reform with efficient use of domestic resources?

4.2 The role of the government/state
The 1995 Constitution and the 2008 Education Act specify that basic education shall be provided and enjoyed as a right to all persons. Under the Education Act, the role of government through relevant agencies is to regulate the sector and design and implement education policy, among other things by providing learning and instructional materials, maintaining the broad aims of education, registering and licensing of teachers, ensuring equitable distribution of education institutions and ensuring supervision of performance in both public and private schools.

The political nature of education reform makes the role of government more political than policy and regulatory. Due to the saliency of education as a public service, education
reform in Uganda suffers from “political capture” in that each election cycle or regime change ushers in new policies/reforms that are not clearly planned out and deliberated on, and makes implementation a nightmare. The appeal of the reforms then becomes a vote mint for politicians. In order to salvage the system, responsible agencies should be required to study all proposed reforms, through consultations with other stakeholders – the private sector, parents, academicians, and students – to assess their efficacy. Sustainable reform requires strong political commitment and transformatory leadership to see the system through successful transition.

4.3 The future of public schools
With privatization and sectoral liberalization that characterized the era of structural adjustment programs, there has been a steady move towards private sector provision of goods and services. The education sector has been no exception. Over the last 20 years, there has been an increased proliferation of private schools, from the primary level up to university level. For example, as of 1990, there were only two public universities (Makerere University – established in 1922, and Mbarara University of Science and Technology – established in 1989) and only one private university (Islamic University in Uganda – established in 1988). As of now, there are five public universities and 34 private universities, not including other public and private awarding degree institutions.¹¹

What the proliferation of private schools implies is that there is less competition among students for placement in government schools as long as the student can afford private education. On the one hand, this is laudable because it means that students have more choice and there are more schools to accommodate the ever increasing number of students. On the other hand however, it implies that the quality of education outcomes is highly compromised because different schools have different standards, especially in the

¹¹ Information available from the National Council for Higher Education at http://www.unch.e.or.ug/index.php/institutions
absence of an institution to control quality and standards. UPE and USE have generally failed the quality of the system as proficiency levels have significantly dropped. Public schools have suffered greatly from the UPE and USE policies, amidst insufficient funding for both instructional and non-instructional materials. There is no doubt that public schools especially at the primary and secondary levels will continue to survive – even though the performance statistics don’t favor them – because of funding from government and the no-fees clause. This survival is attributed to the level of poverty especially in the rural areas and those areas in the urban areas that are pockets of poverty. It should be noted that public schools which outperform the private schools exhibit private school tendencies, i.e. private sponsorship, and have not gone completely UPE or USE. Private schools not captured by the profit motive alone but have good standards, will be the paragons of quality education in the future.

5. Recommendation and conclusion
The role of education in the development of a nation cannot be underestimated. In a continually globalizing world, Uganda can only take its position in the world economy with a competitive edge in human capital development. Even as the country moves to integrate fully in the East African Community, the quality of the outputs of the education system will matter as to whether Uganda becomes the leader or the laggard. The failures of Uganda’s education sector reform can be categorized as either government failures or policy failures.

The government failures that must be corrected in order to effect the objectives of reform, i.e. increasing access, equity, and the quality of education, among other things include: i) the political capture of the education process and policymaking must cease and oversight institutions as stewards of the system must ensure that they give oversight without political interference; ii) the level of inefficiency in autonomous institutions affiliated to education and duplication of duties in ministries must cease and give way to
harmonization, which would engender a mechanism of accountability; iii) the different levels of government, the central government and lower levels of government who are the service providers must harmonize their operations to minimize bureaucratic encumbrances in financing and service delivery channels; and iv) attempts at reform must be properly planned and the implementation plan clearly laid out in a systematic manner. Those individuals and institutions responsible for reform must be held accountable in case of failure.

The policy failures that must be addressed if reform is to happen among other things include the following: i) As it is currently, Uganda lacks a national policy on education. The Government White Paper of 1992 was never ratified through a process of public debate at the local and national levels as had been the intention of the education and sports minister at the time. Since 1992 however, the white paper has been used as basis for education and all national documents cite the paper as basis for policy. As Uganda develops a national policy on education, regional integration as well as globalization must be put into consideration. ii) The politicization of the policymaking process hinders coherent policy formulation as policies and national priorities are introduced during or at the time of elections – as the case was for UPE and USE. This means that individual political priorities take precedent over national priorities as each individual politician strives to achieve their promises. iii) International obligations and constitutional obligations regarding education policy often times are vague and ambiguous, which makes success difficult to measure. For example, on MDG number two – achieving universal primary education – does universal enrollment translate into quality education or is enrollment sufficient? From Uganda’s experience, there has been a tradeoff between access and quality. Policymakers should be able to sift through the nebulous obligations to clearly state what reforms should be adopted, how exactly implementation will be undertaken, and how success is measured.
There are broader questions to ask with regard to reform: Is the reform sustainable? What circumstances enhance or hinder reform? How can the reform process be managed effectively and efficiently? How should this reform take place? What should the roles of the state actors, non-state actors, and the international community be in the process of reform? Who should take ownership of reform? To answer these questions requires a holistic approach and the commitment of all stakeholders. But, holistic approaches take time, and the state of Uganda’s education system requires immediate shock therapy.
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**Other Documents Reviewed**


The Education (Pre-primary, Primary, and Post-Primary) Act (2008)

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