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**Political Turmoil, Fiscal Austerity and Education: The Case of Improving
Primary Teacher Quality in Uganda**

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ABSTRACT

Post-colonial Uganda up to mid-1980's is largely a tale of economic crisis, political turmoil, and war which severely affected the quality of education. Indeed, Uganda's once impressive economic and social infrastructure was devastated by insecurity (World Bank Report, 2002; TISSA Uganda Report, 2013). Nonetheless, since 1986, the education system has expanded, and primary teacher population more than doubled (TISSA Uganda Report, 2013). Unfortunately, Government financing for primary education is extremely low which has implications on access to, and quality of education. Many pupils drop out of schools without numerate and literate skills (EPRC, 1989; GMR, 2014). Besides, there is neglect of primary teachers training and teacher motivation (World Bank, 1993; GMR, 2013). The main purpose of the study is to explore interventions to improve primary teacher quality in Uganda. Using the questionnaire and interview enabled the identification of the aspects considered important in improving primary teacher quality in Uganda such as funding PTC's, effective training of teacher trainees in PTC's, training of tutors, effective management of teacher colleges, and policy options to be adopted by the MoES. Data analysis shows that teacher quality is dependent on a combination of different factors such as classroom practices, subject knowledge, professional development, and teaching experience and quality of teacher-student relationships which in turn impact on student outcomes. Furthermore, the study findings demonstrate that both the pre-service and in-service training for teacher trainees are superficial and inadequate and thus have little bearing on classroom practice. In a bid to improve primary teacher quality in Uganda, it is recommended that Pre-Service Education and Training should shift the mode of training from full-time less effective and costly residential training to part time non-residential training. In addition, it is recommended that the curriculum of primary teacher training courses should move beyond pedagogical principles and educational theories, and focus on skills and abilities which contribute directly to the promotion of improved learning by pupils in real world classrooms. The paper explores the centrality of improving primary teacher quality through realistic, affordable and cost effective pre-service and in-service training and education.

Keywords: *Teacher quality, UPE, Teacher training, Teacher motivation, Quantitative expansion, Moonlighting*

Introduction

To a considerable extent, post-colonial Uganda up to mid-1980 is a tale of economic crisis, frequent political and military conflict. As a result, education in Uganda has suffered from two decades of neglect and decay emanating from war, political unrest, and destruction of the economic base of the country. Indeed, Uganda's once impressive economic and social infrastructure was devastated by war, misrule, instability and insecurity (World Bank, 1993; World Bank, 2002). Nevertheless, with the return of relative of peace since the mid 1980' the education system has expanded rapidly. For instance, between 1980 and 1990, the number of primary schools and students increased by 89% and 85% respectively. The primary teacher

population more than doubled from about 34,000 in 1980, to 79,000 in 1992 (World Bank, 1993; MoES Report, 2012). Unfortunately, this quantitative expansion has not been met by a concomitant increase in quality (Ocitti, 1993; Najjumba, and Marshall, 2013). In the circumstances, the extremely low level of government financing for primary education leads to inequity in access to education and a deterioration of its quality. For instance, a significant proportion of pupils fails and repeats grades or drop out from the school system without numerate and literate skills and knowledge to fend for themselves (EPRC, 1989; TISSA Uganda Report, 2013). Precisely, there is an apparent neglect of primary teachers in terms of motivation. In fact, the deplorably low teacher's salaries in Uganda lead to abuses, such as teachers teaching at more than one school, leaving pupils to work on their own, and watering down regular teaching in order to encourage attendance at private tutoring sessions (World Bank, 1993; TISSA Uganda Report, 2013). Clearly, the above factors have not only impacted on the morale of the primary teacher, but also on the quality of education hence the need to examine this aspect.

Thus, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of the quantitative expansion that has been achieved so far, issues of quality merit attention. The paper deems it appropriate to examine improving primary teacher quality in Uganda particularly with the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE), in 1992 and the apparent failure of most primary schools to produce literate and numerate school leavers. As Hawes and Stephens (1990) contend, any discussion of the teachers' role in the education system will inevitably concern the professional training of teachers both pre- and in-service. It is against this background that the paper attempts to explore the centrality of improving primary quality through realistic, affordable and cost-effective pre-service and in-service training and education.

The paper begins by setting the scene with a concise description of Uganda's socio-economic and political setting and its impact on primary teacher education. Second, a justification to improve primary teacher quality in Uganda is made. Relevant literature focuses on the notion of teacher quality, and the quality of primary teacher education where the crises that bedevil teacher education in Uganda are discussed. The study is descriptive and its main purpose is to explore interventions to improve primary teacher quality in Uganda. The questionnaire and interview enabled the identification of the aspects considered important in improving primary teacher quality in Uganda such as funding PTC's, effective training of

teacher trainees in PTC's, training of tutors, effective management of teacher colleges, and policy options to be adopted by the MoES. The key findings are highlighted and discussed, and a number of recommendations and policy options to improve teacher quality are made. The paper ends with a conclusion and implications for Uganda.

Uganda: The Economy, Politics and Education

Political unrest, Economic crisis and Teacher Education

Uganda is situated in the heart of the great lakes region of Africa. The long years of misrule and wanton destruction have severely affected the socioeconomic fabric of the country. Indeed, Uganda's social indicators are deplorably low. For instance, in the education sector by 1995 almost 40% of the primary teachers are untrained, only 42% of the classes are in permanent structures, primary school enrolment ratio is 71% overall, and only 63% for girls, all primary teacher training colleges (PTC's) lack text books and training materials, and the tutors are all de facto part time.

With a weakened economy, civil strife and rampant corruption, government's capacity to deliver social services is affected by constraints, such as low revenue and lack of a living wage for teachers. Thus, meager salaries and deplorable working conditions have severely demoralised the teaching force. The rate of attrition among primary teachers is high mainly due to poor pay, lack of promotional opportunities, the AIDS pandemic, inadequate instructional materials and a generally demotivating working environment. Attempts to remedy the situation have had no remarkable impact. Reform is desired in many areas, primary teacher education most seriously.

Primary Teacher Education

In Uganda, pre-service trainees enter primary teacher colleges (PTC's) after completing four years of secondary education "O" level, and embark on a two year course leading to the award of a Grade III certificate. The older Grade II certificate which enrolled primary school graduates for a four-year training course was phased out in 1987.

The number of PTC's, most of them founded by religious institutions, increased from 31 in 1980 to 94 in 1988, without any planning and adequate budgetary provision (World Bank, 1993). This rapid expansion was a response to the increased demand for trained teachers to cope with the expanded primary education. Regrettably, many of the PTC's were established

in facilities built for primary or secondary schools. Indisputably, the quality of the establishments created, as well as their products became undermined by the subsequent lack of resource support. Arguably, the expansion further accentuated the already appalling situation of tutor shortages and quality, thus raising questions pertaining to the quality of training offered. This calls for the need to explore the relationship of teacher educator training and the performance of teacher trainees. In fact good teachers must feed their practice into good training. A good many colleges were operating below capacity and uneconomic which prompted Government to reduce their population from 94 to 69 (Evans and Odaet, 1991; World Bank, 1993). Currently, there are 52 PTC's in Uganda, 7 of which are privately owned (TISSA Uganda Report, 2013).

The Need to Rethink the Nature of the Problem

To improve the quality of primary teachers in Uganda, there would seem to be sense in creating a vision of a teacher education system as it should be in future. What this would seem to imply, is that after evolving such a vision one can revisit the current situation and design strategies to effect the implementation of that vision. As Evans and Odaet (1991) put it, the challenge is to create a vision of a workable system which can produce the quantity and quality of teachers needed by Uganda and yet one which is realistic and affordable. Increasingly, therefore, the traditional definition of the problem i.e. an inadequate teaching force properly prepared and certified by initial and in-service courses offered by the Primary Teacher Training Colleges (PTC's) appears futile in achieving an adequate vision for the future of primary teacher education in Uganda. The frivolity of the traditional definition of the problem stems from its apparent implication that the panacea lies in providing better and larger amounts of the same training which failed to produce the desired quality of learning in the schools. Uganda is operating in the context of severe resource scarcity and it would therefore be unwise to opt for such a costly venture. Likewise, it is vital to rethink traditional approaches in quality improvement if the consequences of adjustment are to be dealt with satisfactorily. Thus, it is worth saying that the problem in Uganda isn't lack of a trained and certified teaching force. Rather the problem is the ineffective performance of practicing teachers in promoting learning on the part of the pupils.

The Concern: Why Improve Primary Teacher Quality in Uganda?

Available evidence suggests that teachers' play a pivotal role in times of rapid change and quality improvement (Trafford and Davies, 1981; Bacchus, 1991; Berliner, 2005; Strong,

2012). Undoubtedly, good teachers are key to good education. Bacchus (1991) suggests that more innovative teaching strategies need to be developed as part of the armoury in providing better quality education. In a similar vein, Fuller (1987) shows, a very strong relationship between teachers' quality and student achievement. Likewise, Garrett (1999) argues that as development occurs and the non-school environment is enhanced, the pupils learn more outside the school and the simple rate of return for education is diminished. Thus, it is crucial Garrett maintains, to consider the quality of what is provided in schools and build upon and enhance the good side of street knowledge. It is therefore possible to argue, that the success of the school depends considerably on the ability of teachers.

Heynemann cited in King (1991) argues that unlike industrialised countries, where out-of-school factors explain more variance than within-school factors, the opposite is true of poor countries. What this would seem to imply, is that in developing countries, educational achievement is not related to socio-economic background. Moreover, the influence of school variables on the performance of students is greater in developing countries than in the developed (World Bank, 1980; World Bank, 2006). It seems, therefore, improving access as the case is in Uganda where enrolment at primary level increased from 2.5m in 1992 to 6.5m in 1999 (MoES Report, 2000), without implementing policies designed to improve the quality of instruction will be meaningless and a waste of public and private resources. Arguably, parents may readily withdraw from a facility where there are few indications that children will find regular teaching, hence the concern to improve teacher quality in Uganda. Thus, there is a need to improve the quality of primary school teachers as a means of increasing learning outcomes. What then makes for this quality? It is to this issue that we now turn.

Literature Review

The Notion of Quality: What makes for Teacher Quality?

The concept of teacher quality in its normative perspective denotes a degree of excellence (Carr, 1989; Strong, 2012). What this would seem to imply, is that quality in teaching presupposes identification of those characteristics of teaching which amount to its excellence. Increasingly, therefore, any interpretation of teaching quality should underscore the significance of educational values and take cognisance of teachers as professional educators, committed to enhancing their professionalism. It may be helpful at this point to note, that in the developing world, particularly Uganda, the pathetic life that characterizes primary school teachers dissuades many people from the profession. Ultimately, teacher

quality is the casualty of the present failure in Uganda to find an adequate and timely solution for the problems that now beset the teaching service.

Some evidence does exist linking quality to practical realities of teaching. It may be necessary to examine, Wilson's (1988; 2014) conception of quality in teaching as "planning, delivering and evaluating the optimum curriculum for the individual pupil in the context of a range of learners..."(p. 18). Therefore, planning, delivering and evaluating the optimum curriculum are cardinal tasks of qualitative teaching. This chimes well with Schwab's (2013) view, that teaching quality relates to the capacity to marshal abstract ethical values on educational practice. It has also to be recognised, that quality in this perspective, implies a teacher's capacity to exhibit knowledge of what is educationally essential in a given situation and his willingness to transform this knowledge so that it can take practical dimensions.

Unlike Wilson's view of quality which is teacher-oriented, other conceptions of teacher quality have taken a more child-centered stance. Other scholars perceive the hall mark of quality teaching as fostering understanding on the one hand, and on the other equipping the learners to apply what is learned to situations beyond the class (Stones, 1992; Strong, 2012; Naylor and Sayed, 2014; Lauwerier and Akkari, 2015).

Despite the apparent divergence in focus, both definitions interface in seeking to achieve high standards in teaching. It is vitally necessary therefore, as Stones maintains, for qualitative teaching to culminate in helping pupils to solve their own problems which may relate to work in school and beyond. In the circumstances, it is possible to argue, that if children cannot apply the knowledge gained at school to the macro environment, then such knowledge is a manifestation of ineffective teaching. Congruent with the same thinking, there is evidence to suggest that teacher quality is to do with how best to bring about the desired pupil learning by some educational activity (Kyriacou, 1986); Strong, 2012). Viewed in this perspective, quality of instruction refers to the extent to which the instruction facilitates pupils to achieve set educational outcomes. Arguably, this may involve considering if the learning experience is organised in the most sound and appropriate ways when the characteristics of the pupils are taken into account.

Intricately interwoven with a concern to improve quality as Garrett (1999) asserts, is the need for education to be effectively and efficiently delivered. Indeed, there is more to quality than the easily measured. Others view quality in terms of relevance, efficiency and something more in the pursuit of excellence and human betterment (Hawes and Stephens, 1990; Naylor

and Sayed, 2014). As a prerequisite to this discussion, it should be said, that efficiency refers to the idea of getting a school to either reach certain standards or to raise the standards. Internal effectiveness, Garrett (1999) contends, is the improvement of the performance of children at the tasks set them at school. External effectiveness, he goes on to suggest, denotes providing children with the skills and knowledge that are transferable to out of, and beyond, school situations. For Garrett therefore, efficiency has much to do with how internal and external effectiveness are achieved. In terms of relevance, education should be relevant to the needs of the individuals and the group in society (Hawes and Stephens, 1990; Strong, 2012).

Increasingly, therefore, to determine quality one has to examine whether the school content makes school leavers immediately more employable. It is crucial to examine whether school knowledge remains school knowledge or it transfers into the home and community once the pupil walks out of school. Precisely, quality is making the most of what you have by obtaining the maximum output from a given input. Nonetheless, the concept of quality and the task of achieving it are exceptionally complex and difficult to unravel. Moreover, there can be no single strategy for improvement of educational quality. What all these factors imply is that for the teacher to improve quality of instruction, he must be properly trained. This is because teacher quality is not an end in itself, but a means of increasing effectiveness in achieving educational goals. This has implications for the quality of teacher training which we now address.

The Quality of Primary Teacher Education in Uganda

Teacher education in Uganda is beset with multiple problems. In fact, teacher education in Uganda suffers from the consequences of political unrest and economic woes (Evans and Odaet, 1991; TISSA Uganda Report, 2013). My contention is that primary teacher education in Uganda is bedevilled by three crises;

- First, there is the crisis of relevance emanating from curricula which are apparently incompatible with the needs of society. For instance, the present primary teacher curriculum does not provide relevant and adequate content to meet the needs for teachers' academic and professional growth, and is not geared to the realisation of the relationship between learning and instruction and meeting the needs of the community.
- Second, the crisis of efficiency which is an offshoot of the apparent failure to optimally utilise educational resources to the maximum benefit of teacher trainees.

- Third, fiscal austerity and the harsh medicine of Structural Adjustment Programmes in Africa have created yet another crisis: the crisis of inadequacy. This crisis manifests itself in inadequate instructional materials, outdated teacher educator guides, shortage of text books and laboratory equipment which tend to reduce the learning process to the accumulation of factual knowledge through rote memorisation or copying facts from the black board. Now that the problems that afflict teacher education in Uganda have been put into their contextual framework, how then do we overcome some of the salient obstacles and exploit the available opportunities to improve primary teacher quality?

Data Collection

This is a descriptive study and its main purpose is to explore interventions to improve primary teacher quality in Uganda.

Questionnaire and interview data were elicited from a sample of 16 Principals, 2 MoES officials, 58 Tutors, 114 teachers' trainees, and 32 opinion leaders in the different communities that participated in the study.

The questionnaire and interview enabled the identification of the aspects considered important in improving primary teacher quality in Uganda such as funding PTC's, effective training of teacher trainees in PTC's, training of tutors, effective management of teacher colleges, and policy options to be adopted by the MoES. To avoid bias the participants (save MoES officials) were selected randomly.

Data Analysis

All the variables in the research as laid down in the questionnaire were measured on a nominal scale. All the returned questionnaires were numbered, edited and cleaned to ensure that the required information was captured and not repeated so as to facilitate easy analysis.

Questionnaire data were analyzed at Univariate and Bivariate levels. Univariate analysis involved use of frequency/ percentages and then mean and standard deviation.

The demographic composition of the respondents was analyzed using frequency percentage distribution as use of descriptive statistics would not give an accurate description of the characteristics.

Descriptive statistics using mean and standard deviation were used in analyzing the responses to each of the variables investigated under improving primary teacher quality in Uganda.

Interview data were examined and classified in terms of themes and subthemes to identify aspects that were most prevalent in improving primary teacher quality in Uganda.

Findings

a) Primary Teacher Quality

The findings show that teacher quality is dependent on a combination of different factors such as;

- a) classroom practices
- b) subject knowledge
- c) professional development
- d) Teaching experience and quality of teacher-student relationships which in turn impact on student outcomes.

These findings signal that it cannot be automatically assumed that teacher certificates and qualifications lead to better teaching. Thus, the focus on teacher quality should be on the effects of teachers on learning.

b) Pre service Education and Training

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that both the pre-service and in-service training for teacher trainees are superficial and inadequate and thus have little bearing on classroom practice. Thus, a new vision for the primary teacher education in Uganda can be built on several concepts and innovations which amount to providing a foundation for more cost effective, realistic and affordable initial training of teachers. Hargreaves et. al., (1991; 2013) suggest, that the aim of initial training is to initiate students in those areas of knowledge which contribute to the formulation of principles that guide the solving of practical educational problems. The current dilemma in Uganda calls for a shift in the mode of training which this study has recommended.

c) Conditions of PTC's in Uganda

With regard to the conditions of the current 52 PTC's in Uganda, the analysis established that some are in temporary facilities which lack even the most basic of amenities. Thus, it is possible to argue that the sorry state of some PTC's does impede teacher quality. In addition, the problem is accentuated by the fact that the PTC's are almost completely dependent on

the central government for resources, having no Parents Teacher's Associations (PTA's) or other local support to whom they can turn. Furthermore, the colleges work in isolation from one another and schools which has worsened the appalling status of teaching. Highlighting the centrality of collaboration, Hawes and Stephens (1990; 2012) affirm, that teacher training institutions need to be more in touch with other professional and training centres in order to raise the status of teaching.

d) Training of Tutors

Regarding the training of tutors, the analysis revealed that majority (79%) felt that given opportunity they would go for further training to improve on their quality, yet the quality of teacher educators is crucial in improving primary teacher quality. Besides, there is a relationship of teacher educator training and performance of teacher trainees (Hawes and Stephens, 1990; Strong, 2012; Lauwerier and Akkari, 2015).

Furthermore, 68% of the responding tutors perceived courses offered to tutor trainees as overly academic, and the system is examination-ridden with a large numbers of tutor trainees operating in situations of resource scarcity. This finding raises a question about the quality of tutors. Yet available evidence affirms that the quality of teacher educators is crucial in improving primary teacher quality (Hawes and Stephens, 1990; Strong, 2012). Quite clearly, the above factors have impacted negatively on the quality of teacher trainees and their commitment and dedication to duty while in the job.

e) Curriculum in PTC's

The findings revealed that the curriculum is overly academic and overloaded with educational theories and pedagogical principles which is consistent with earlier studies (Evans and Odaet, 1991; World Bank, 1993; 2004). Thus, the major fault of most pre-service teacher education is that it does not address itself to the needs of the schools in which its graduates will work. The futility of educational theories and pedagogical principles lies in their weak relationship to pupil learning, which makes them something of a luxury in situations of resource scarcity characteristic in Uganda. This finding is worrying considering that available evidence underscores the need of teacher training curriculum that focuses on professional needs of teachers, and matches in style and process of schools thus giving trainee teachers models of good practice (Thomas and Shaw, 1992; Ndaw, 1997; Garrett, 1999; Strong, 2012).

Recommendations

In light of the study findings, a number of recommendations are made to improve primary teacher quality in Uganda;

1-Pre-Service Education and Training

The current dilemma in Uganda calls for a shift in the mode of training from full-time less effective and costly full-time residential training to part time non-residential training. It is anticipated that this will lower the unit cost of training for there are no costs for room and board.

2- The Overcrowded Curriculum

In the Ugandan context, one of the major problems of pre-service primary teacher education is irrelevant curricula loaded with pedagogical principles and educational theories. Thus, it is recommended that to improve primary teacher quality the curriculum of teacher training courses should focus on skills and abilities which contribute directly to the promotion of improved learning by pupils in real world classrooms.

3- In-Service Education and Training (INSET)

The findings show that primary school teachers are not properly prepared at the pre-service stage, and their quality further deteriorates due to lack of in-service programmes. Accordingly, as a teacher quality improvement measure, PTC's in Uganda should cease to function solely to offering pre-service programmes only but provide ongoing support and professional education and training for both qualified and untrained teachers.

4- Assessment of Teacher Trainees

The overly academic curriculum of PTC's has created a system of measuring educational success basing considerably on the trainee teacher ability to recall factual knowledge (memorisation) and pass exams. This system of evaluation needs to be overhauled if teacher quality is to improve. Thus, it is recommended that qualities of a good teacher should relate more to aspects such as performance in class, attitudes, interest in the profession, personal and interpersonal skills, and morality.

5-Training and Motivation of Tutors

In a bid to better career structures and retain able and talented tutors, it is recommended to provide teacher educators with an opportunity to gain practical primary classroom experience by working alongside existing teachers. By doing so, tutors educators will have recent and relevant experience which will help student teachers relate practice to theory. Short term

tutor training courses as the case is in Ghana (BESIP, 1996) deserve serious consideration by Uganda educators and planners.

Furthermore, central to sustaining the urge of continuing education is motivation of the teacher educator. Therefore, as a strategy for improving primary teacher quality, salaries and benefits of teachers and tutors need to be rationally adjusted upwards to an acceptable amount commensurate with their credentials. If qualitative teaching is to be maintained, it is vitally necessary to ensure that salaries of teacher educators do not decline in both real and relative terms.

Conclusion and Implications for Uganda

Contemporary trends in teacher education demonstrate substantial agreement in many countries on major policies and practices needed for the improvement of teacher quality and standards. Their implications for Uganda deserve serious consideration for in significant respects primary teacher quality falls well behind standards sought elsewhere. The paper has demonstrated that there are several deficient or inadequate features of initial teacher education in Uganda which require attention, as part of a major, comprehensive review to improve the quality of the primary teaching force.

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