Universal primary education policy and quality of education in Uganda: The cases of Kabale and Soroti districts

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1. Introduction

The introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Policy in 1997 was part of the reform program of the Ugandan government. The adoption of the said policy was to increase access, equity, and quality of primary education with the view to eradicate illiteracy and subsequently transform society from the doldrums of poverty. This was also in line with the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) of 1997 and the Education Sector Strategic Plan of 1998-2003. The adoption of the UPE Policy also demonstrated the country’s commitment to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA). Due to the government’s strong commitment to implement such policies, the enrollment rate at the primary education has improved significantly, from 3.0 million in 1996 to 5.3 million in 1997. In 2010 over 8.0 million students are enrolled in primary schools, of which 51 percent are females and 49 percent males. Consequently, the ratio of boys to girls in primary schools has improved from 55:45 in 1986 to 52:48 in 2000 and to 49:51 in 2010 (MoES 2010). As in many education systems of the world, the rapid increase in enrollment at the primary level in Uganda brought about several challenges, one of which is the quality of the education being received at the primary level.

One cannot deny that the education of our children today is a vital part of our future. However, we hear repeatedly in today’s media that the present state of Uganda’s educational system is failing. One area in particular under scrutiny is our primary school system. It is argued that our nation’s primary schools are not preparing pupils with the technical know-how, intelligence, and problem-solving skills that they need to live out their dreams and pursue successful careers. Since education plays an important role in the increase in human capital capacity and competitiveness of a country, the schools are not clearly preparing Ugandan students.

Recent findings that cognitive achievement is statistically important in determining workers’ productivity suggest that pupils’ achievement has important implications for economic growth (Byamugisha 2010). This recognition of the economic importance of the quality of pupil learning has led to attempts, both in Uganda and internationally, to understand better the determinants of pupil achievement. Consequently, the quality of education is a key parameter for the assessment of the performance of any educational system.
The experience of the majority of the developing countries including Uganda is that many children do not acquire basic literacy and numeracy even after six years of schooling. Although access to primary education is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition for ensuring the development of cognitive competencies. Primary education, especially in developing countries, is the core of the schooling system. It serves the greatest number of students, absorbs the largest share of spending on education, and builds the bedrock of human capital development. Typically, therefore, the performance of primary education attracts policy debate both in terms of the systems coverage at this level of schooling and its ability to produce student learning. The focus thus far has been on the quantity of education; however, the quality of education in many developing countries is low in the sense that children learn much less in school than the curriculum states they should learn (Lockheed & Verspoor 1991; Hanushek 1995; Hanushek 1996). This low quality is not entirely surprising because the rapid expansion of primary and secondary education in developing countries has strained those countries’ financial and human resources.

The performance of students on achievement tests administered within many of these countries especially Uganda suggests that academic achievement is often very low (Byamugisha 2004). The relative poor school performance may be partly explained by the physical absence of head teachers, teachers and pupils from school, lack of teacher engagement in the classroom, and other low key performance indicators, including pupil teacher ratio, pupil-classroom ratio and lack of availability of instructional materials (MoES 2007). Such poor educational outcomes not only highlight the internal inefficiencies in Uganda’s education system, but also cast doubts on her ability to accumulate the requisite human capital for sustainable economic development. In light of the increased expenditure on key school inputs for Ugandan primary schools, it is important to understand why knowledge and skills acquisition has not registered similar improvements.

Understanding what factors and investments most efficiently improve pupil learning in class is of crucial importance. This study takes another step toward that goal in the context of Uganda. Surprisingly, few studies have investigated the determinants of pupil achievement in the classroom. The challenge facing policy makers is therefore enormous: how to maintain (or improve) learning outcomes in schools, while making efforts to ensure that all children reach the end of the primary cycle. In light of this, the government has and continues to design different strategies geared towards improving the quality of primary education. Consequently, there has been mass teacher recruitment, mass teacher training (pre and in-service), teacher upgrading, teacher refresher training and continuous professional development, and construction of classroom and teacher houses.

2. Problem Statement

Over the past decades, educational planners, policy makers and administrators all over the
world have become increasingly concerned about the quality of education provided by the school system. They have come to realize that many meaningful improvements in the quality of education that pupils receive are highly dependent on the quality of teachers (Anderson 1991). This situation is especially true in developing countries where teachers are usually the only adults in the classroom who transact educational inputs to the pupils. Due to lack of monitoring and evaluation of pupil performance, the progress of pupils is largely assessed by teacher-made tests conducted at the end of each term and year as a proxy for pupil achievement in all grades in the primary cycle (MoES 2007). In a promotion system based on the level of performance, as is the system in Uganda, it is generally accepted that the high repetition and drop-out rates attest to the low standard of pupil performance. Given this background, it is of particular interest in this study to address the above concerns for Uganda. A qualitative approach to this study is chosen because most of the identified issues are not easily elaborated upon by quantitative data.

The study attempts to investigate the following two research questions:
- What are the attendance patterns for the head teachers, teachers and pupils in primary schools?
- How do teacher characteristics influence learner achievement during the teaching and learning process?

3. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the quality of education by focusing on the actual classroom situation in Uganda. In doing so, the study generates information on key variables impacting the quality of primary education in each of the selected (sampled) primary schools in Kabale and Soroti districts, and analyzes the similarities and differences of each district. The first objective of this study is to examine teachers’ and pupils’ attendance patterns overtime. The second objective is to examine the teachers’ characteristics that influence learner achievements during the teaching and learning process.

For this study, both Kabale and Soroti districts were selected because of their unique geographical location, ethnic composition, and educational performance. Kabale is relatively good in all performance indicators though with some hard to stay areas representing Western, South and Central regions of Uganda, while Soroti is an average performing district and represents the Northern and Eastern regions of Uganda. The primary schools were selected based on their location (i.e., rural, peri-urban and urban) and performance (i.e., good performing, average, and poor performing), which these districts have.
4. Significance of the Study

The qualitative improvement of the Ugandan primary school pupils is still a questionable issue as attested in the high repetition rates, although the quantitative expansion in pupil enrollment has been impressive since the implementation of the UPE Policy. One of the reasons for the slow improvement is seen in the shortage of scholarly work that is helpful for policy intervention. Although it is generally accepted in the literature that there are significant relationships between pupil achievement and teacher factors, different studies show different results depending on the countries and circumstances. Premised on these inconsistent results and the shortage of research in this field in Uganda, this study was conducted to identify the factors that affect the quality of primary education in Uganda. While contributing to the body of knowledge on school effectiveness in Uganda, the results of this study are particularly useful to the Ugandan MoES and non-governmental organizations involved in educational development as the results can serve as a guide in designing interventions intended to improve the quality of teacher performance and pupil achievement.

This study sought to investigate issues related to the quality of education under the implementation of the UPE policy, both at the national and school level. It was expected that this study would contribute to both policy and practical implementation of the UPE programme. In policy terms, the focus on the attendance of the head teacher, teacher and pupil; teacher engagement; and pupil academic performance under the programme exposes both constraints and opportunities at the local level that should contribute to improvement of the UPE policy and its implementation. Therefore, the findings of this study provide an important resource to a broad audience of educators, policy makers and funding partners, in a number of ways, not least among them, improvements in the implementation and impact of the UPE programme.

The study makes a timely contribution to the body of knowledge on educational reforms since a systematic study of pupil attendance and classroom learning under the UPE programme did not exist at the time a decision was taken to conduct this study. The majority of the studies were either carried out before 1997, the year the UPE programme was introduced. Even more recent studies do not fully examine the relationships between the factors responsible for pupil academic performance under the UPE programme, which are classroom-based.

5. Literature Review

According to previous studies, factors which affect learning achievement include the level of educational attainment of teachers, number of years of teaching experience, participation in in-service training programs, and teacher engagement (e.g., Fuller 1987, 1990; Greenwald, Hedges & Laine 1996; Cheng 1996; Jordan, Mendro & Weesinhee 1997; Darling-Hammond 2000; Bambico 2001, 2002). Subject matter knowledge is a variable that is generally thought to have a linear relationship with pupil performance. Although there is no consensus objective
measurement of how the teacher’s knowledge of subject matter should be measured, the level of educational attainment is generally considered an indication of teacher’s knowledge of subject matter. While there is some support for the assumption that there is a relationship between knowledge of subject matter and pupil achievement, the findings are not as strong and consistent as one might suppose in the developed countries (Darling-Hammond 2000).

Studies in American schools found no consistent relationship between teacher’s subject matter knowledge and teacher performance as measured by pupil outcome or supervisory ratings (Haney, Madaus & Kreitzer 1987). Previous studies in developing countries also showed inconsistent relationships between the level of educational attainment of teachers and pupil outcome. Govinda and Varghese (1996) found that the educational attainment of teachers positively influenced pupils in all localities in India. However, in the urban area, the effects of qualification would be significant only if teachers possessed a graduate or postgraduate degree.

Other studies on teacher effectiveness have found a relationship between the length of teaching experience and pupil achievement in developed countries (Murnane & Phillips 1981; Noriega, Lavin & Martinez 1996). In America, according to Hanushek (1996), teachers’ years of teaching experience were more consistently related to pupil achievement than their educational quality, although some studies failed to establish the relationship. In developing countries, research studies also found inconsistent results in this aspect. Some studies showed a positive relationship between teacher experience and pupil achievement (Heyneman & Loxley 1983), while others showed no relationship (Schiefelbein & Simmons 1981). In his review of 23 school effectiveness research studies, Fuller (1987) found that only 10 studies confirmed the hypothesis of significant relationship between teachers’ years of teaching experience and pupil outcome. To help teachers update their academic background and teaching performance, teachers are provided with continuous opportunity for professional development through in-service training programs. The academic and professional training of teachers after the embarkation of their teaching career has been found to have a direct and positive bearing on the quality of their teaching practices and pupil achievement subsequently (Burgess & Galloway 1993; Noriega, Lavin & Martinez 1996; Bambico 2001, 2002).

In addition to the above characteristics of teachers’ academic quality, their non-academic quality such as motivation and satisfaction were also found to affect pupil outcome in previous studies (Lockheed & Verspoor 1991; Carron & Châu 1996; Chang 1996). The explanation given is that motivated and satisfied teachers appeared to have a better professional commitment for the benefits of their pupils (Ma 1999; Hean & Garrett 2001). These teachers are more willing to spend more time exploring knowledge with their pupils. On the other hand, poorly motivated and dissatisfied teachers make frequent absences and exhibit indifferent behaviors to their pupils and inappropriate classroom practices, thereby impeding their ability to teach.

Teacher absenteeism, an observable indicator of teacher effort and performance, has been the focus of several recent studies. Chaudhury et al. (2004) report on surveys in six developing countries that yield observational data on absence of teachers and health workers. Averaging
across the six countries, they find an absence rate of 19%, among primary school teachers. Indonesia’s estimated absence rate is 19%, thus ranking it an atypical country in the sample, with a lower teacher absence than India (25%) or Uganda (27%) but a higher absence than Peru (11%), Ecuador (14%), or Bangladesh (16%). Two other project studies have yielded preliminary results on the correlation between absence and performance. In India, higher primary teacher absence is correlated with a small but strongly significant reduction in predicted test scores (Kremer et al. 2005). On the other hand, in Bangladesh, teacher absence predicts lower scores in English but not mathematics (Chaudhury et al. 2004).

School resources are among the key inputs which the government of Uganda focuses on. To this effect, teachers, classrooms and equipments are vital. According to the Quality Enhancement Initiative (QEI) baseline survey conducted in 2009 (Makerere Institute of Social Reserch 2009), the overall pupil-teacher ratio was as high as 65:1 and above in a half of the QEI in the 12 worst districts of Uganda. Related findings were obtained from his review of about 100 studies from the developing world (Hanushek 1995). Hanushek found the results inconclusive regarding the impact of class size and teacher experience, but found that teacher education appeared to have a stronger impact in the developing world. He also recognized that there was a larger share of studies in the developing world that reported a significant effect of school resources, suggesting that school resources are likely to play a more significant role in the developing world than in the U.S. Similar conclusions were reached by Velez, Schiefelbein and Valenzuela (1993) in their review of 18 studies and 88 regression models from Latin America. Teacher education, subject matter knowledge, active methodologies and teacher experience appeared significant in a large share of the studies, but they found no effect for in-service training and class size.

By contrast, other studies find that small class sizes are either not significant or even detrimental to student performance (Hanushek 1995; Hoxby 2000; Urquiola 2006). In addition, Jones (2001) reviews 277 econometric studies on the effect of class size on achievement and finds that 28% of the studies report statistically significant estimates but 13% of those report a negative sign. A recent study of secondary schools in India (Kingdon 1996) finds an insignificant positive sign on the class size variable in determining student achievements. The author concludes that a reduction in class size may not be useful in a developing country such as Uganda.

6. Methodology

In this study, the qualitative study (i.e. interviews and observations) were mainly used to investigate our research questions. Thus, semi-structured interviews were conducted to the head teachers to solicit their views on a wide range of issues including: a) participation of communities and other donors in supporting school programs and activities; b) teacher and pupil class attendance/absenteeism; and c) pupil feeding arrangements in schools. Moreover,
semi-structured interviews were conducted with the individual teachers regarding pupil, teacher and head teacher attendance patterns; pupils’ learning environment; and the nature and level of support from head teachers and school community.

Observations were also conducted using our observation guide. Data were collected to ascertain and assess the friendliness of the learning environment; determine patterns of teacher and pupil attendance; and understand the overall teaching process, implications of the overcrowdedness of classrooms, and the monitoring systems of the schools. Furthermore, the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) results were analyzed to come up with firm conclusions on the quality of education at the primary level.

In the course of limited duration and budget, an in-depth case study method was applied with a small number of samples of approximately 10 schools from each of the two districts of Kabale and Soroti. The schools included both rural and urban/semi-urban schools, comprising poor performing, average performing, and well performing schools. The primary schools visited in Kabale included Bubare Primary School, Kaharo Primary School, Kiheesi Primary School, Kitohwa Primary School, Muchahi Primary School, Muhanga Primary School, Nyakigugwe Primary School, Nyeikunama Primary School, Rushoroza Boys Primary School, and Rutooma Primary School. In Soroti, the schools included Aarapo Primary School, Abelet Primary School, Angopet Primary School, Awoja Primary School, Kidetok Primary School, Madera Boys Primary School, Okulonyo Primary School, Pigire Primary School, Rock View Primary School, and Serere Township Primary School.

Schools mentioned above included the low, middle, and high performing schools. The study considered the head teachers, teachers and pupils as target respondents who were interviewed to respond to the overarching research questions. A total number of 20 head teachers, 40 teachers and 40 pupils were interviewed. In total, 20 classroom observations were made.

7. Findings of the Study

7.1. Attendance patterns for head teachers, teachers’ and pupils’ in primary school

Head teacher attendance patterns
Head teacher’s presence in the primary school is very critical and has a direct impact on school management (Makerere Institute of Social Research 2002). The consequence of this is that teachers in schools where head teachers are regularly absent lack supervision and guidance required to enhance their performance. Data on head teacher attendance collected from our study indicated that out of the 10 schools visited in Kabale, five (50%) head teachers were absent from school on the days the study was conducted while in Soroti district, only 1 (1%) was absent. This means that there is higher head teacher absenteeism in Kabale than Soroti.
Teacher attendance and absenteeism

Teacher absenteeism can represent a major threat to the continuity of pupil’s learning, especially where this occurs on a relatively frequent basis. High levels of teacher absenteeism from school can also add significantly to the level of demand on those teachers who are present at school, as they are frequently called upon to take up extra workload. The head teacher is responsible for ensuring that teachers attend and carry out the actual teaching in class. Teachers interviewed indicate that the head teachers supervise them and do take disciplinary measures against those that absent themselves without clear communication. The methods used for tracking teacher attendance are arrival books and classroom teaching, among others. The findings of our study indicated that 18 out of 20 head teachers in Kabale and Soroti districts reported that teachers seek permission before leaving school, 12 out of 20 (4 in Kabale and 8 in Soroti) reported that other teachers inform them, while a minority 2 out of 20 reported that pupils report their teachers who absent themselves.

Through observation and checking of pupil exercise books of the most regularly present pupils in grade 3 (P3) and grade 6 (P6) and noting the number of times they received lessons since the beginning of Term 3 in 2009, the findings revealed that the number of lessons received by pupils of both lower and upper primary is fairly low across all districts. In the 2 weeks of Term 3 that were observed, pupils received about 5 lessons of mathematics and science subjects. This implied that teachers seem to be spending a good amount of their time relaxing, especially at the beginning of the term, and causing pupils to lose what they are supposed to cover in a given term.

Pupil attendance

Ideally, pupils are expected to attend school throughout the school term. Pupil school attendance is a key variable in predicting class performance. The attendance patterns of pupils can significantly impact their learning achievement as well as quality outcomes. Pupils who regularly attend class are predicted to perform better in examinations than those who are frequently absent.

For this study, it was established that the common methods of tracking pupil attendance included the use of daily attendance registers, daily attendance boards, and grouping of pupils. In addition, the regularity of pupils’ attendance was determined by district and class level (i.e., lower and upper primary). Results indicated that most pupils’ attendance was irregular; only 4 pupils in grade 6 in both Kabale and Soroti were found to have attended school regularly. In lower primary school, 5 pupils in Kabale and 4 pupils in Soroti were found to have attended school regularly. A total of 11 pupils (i.e., 5 in Kabale and 6 in Soroti) in grade 6 (P6) and 10 pupils (i.e., 6 in Kabale and 4 in Soroti) in grade 3 (P3) were irregular in school. By implication, it can be interpreted that where pupils’ attendance is irregular, performance tends to be affected negatively.
**Pupil absenteeism**

Government reform policies and efforts aimed at improving pupils’ educational attainment in literacy and numeracy are heavily dependent upon the availability of teachers, learners’ attendance and head teachers, among other factors. In the course of this study to assess the quality of education under the UPE policy, a question was asked to the stakeholders to find out the causes of pupil absenteeism in schools. The findings are presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Reasons for pupil absenteeism**

![Reasons for pupil absenteeism](image)

Source: Created by the authors based on survey data (2009)

Note: SM=Scholastic Materials

The main reasons responsible for the continued high levels of pupil absenteeism both in lower and upper primary schools (for both girls and boys) according to the stakeholders interviewed by ranking included: involvement in household chore; sickness; peer pressure; involvement in petty trade; lack of scholastic materials; and lack of meals while at school. The study found that at least 10 out of 10 pupils in Kabale district had two or three meals a day while in Soroti, 9 out of 10 pupils had no single meal in a day. This greatly affects their learning abilities and eventual learning outcomes since they are likely to lose their concentration while the teacher is teaching. The study findings are in agreement with the findings of the National Assessment Progress in Education survey (2008) carried out by the Uganda National Examination Board and Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) studies (Byamugisha 2004).

The interviews with teachers revealed that lack of scholastic materials, lack of meals, absenteeism, peer pressure among boys and early marriages among girls were the key constraints to pupils’ performance. On the other hand, pupils said that lack of scholastic materials, hunger, sickness and long distance to school were the major challenges they faced in learning. Agyeman (1993) asserts that a teacher who does not have both the academic and professional teacher qualification would undoubtedly have a negative influence on the teaching and learning of his/her subject. On the other hand, he is quick to mention that a teacher who is
academically and professionally qualified, but works under unfavorable conditions of service would be less dedicated to do his work and thus be less productive than a teacher who is unqualified but works under favorable conditions of service.

7.2. Teachers’ characteristics influence learner achievements

Teachers’ characteristics in the learning process aid the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. However, for teachers’ characteristics to have positive outcomes, the methodology used such as techniques of teaching and learning materials matter significantly. In order to assess teacher’s characteristics in the teaching and learning processes, the study attempted to find out the various characteristics of teachers in the school.

**Teachers’ academic and professional qualifications**

The study collected data on teachers’ qualification and professional profile. It established that 12 teachers (i.e., 5 in Kabale and 7 in Soroti) out of the 20 teachers of the upper primary schools in both Kabale and Soroti districts were Grade III certificate holders, while 8 out of 20 (i.e., 2 in Kabale and 6 in Soroti) were Grade V certificate holders. In the case of lower primary school, it is noted that 13 out of 20 lower primary teachers (i.e., 5 in Kabale and 8 in Soroti) were Grade III certificate holders while 7 out of 20 (i.e., 4 in Kabale and 3 in Soroti) were grade V certificate holders. It is apparent that Soroti district had more trained teachers at both Grade III and V levels. However in terms of performance at Primary Leaving Examination (PLE), it is noted that Kabale consistently performed better than Soroti, an indication that teachers’ professional qualification is not a determinant of performance.

**Preparation of lesson plans and schemes of work**

The study also attempted to find out the number of teachers in Kabale and Soroti district who had developed lesson plans and schemes of work. Results from the study indicated that although all 10 teachers in Soroti had lesson plans, only 9 had lesson plans with clearly stated objectives. On the other hand, in Kabale, 6 teachers had lesson plans with clearly stated objectives. In addition, it was observed that all teachers in Soroti district had schemes of work, while only 3 teachers out of 10 had them in Kabale. This leaves a big question of how effective a teacher can deliver the lesson without a lesson plan and scheme of work.

**Teachers’ adherence to school timetable**

Timetabling and allocation of time on the timetable is based on the amount of content to be covered in a given class. It is important that all time assigned to teaching is used for this purpose and failure to adhere to the time table has a negative impact on content coverage which may adversely affect learner achievement. Results reveal that the most head teachers were regularly monitoring and supervision teachers by checking of lesson plans and schemes of work.
as well as timing of lessons to ensure that teachers adhere to the timetable. It is also noted that some teachers at school fail to execute their teaching duties when they are actually present at school and therefore failure to adhere to the timetable. Data/information collected indicate that the main causes of this include: absenteeism by pupils as reported by 7 head teachers out of 10 in Soroti and 2 in Kabale district; sickness as reported by 7 head teachers in both Kabale and Soroti; unpreparedness as reported by 3 head teachers in Soroti and 5 in Kabale; and lack of interest by teachers in general.

The study also tried to establish the amount of time that is allocated to each lesson in both upper and lower primary and the actual time that teachers were taking to conduct the lesson. The data on this variable was captured both through interviews and through observation of the lessons that were being conducted. The findings revealed that the time allocated per lesson for lower primary was only 30 minutes while that of upper primary was 40 minutes. However, it was observed that the time was not adequate to allow the teacher to deliver the lesson effectively including assigning pupil tasks.

*Teachers’ pedagogical skills*

A teacher’s pedagogical skills determine pupil’s learning achievement and attendance in class. Friendly approaches and the teacher’s professional knowledge of the subject content influence pupils’ learning abilities, and vice versa. Through observation, it was noted that teachers greeted pupils at the beginning of the lesson, and in most cases addressed pupils by their names. This is one way of developing or building confidence among the pupils. Teachers asked questions and pupils eagerly put up their hands to answer the questions. However, in some schools, some teachers were not calling the pupils by their names and in some instances they did not know the pupils’ names. The implication of this is that there is no attachment between teachers and learners and indicated that the learning environment is not friendly. However, the teachers were not giving room for pupils to ask questions but even then, the percentage of pupils who took the initiative to ask questions in both classes was below 20%. This may indicate lack of confidence of the pupils resulting from poor teacher-pupil relationship or inability to follow content, both of which negatively impact learning.

The children were also asked the subjects they preferred and the reasons for preference of those subjects. Results indicated that English was the most preferred subject as reported by 10 and 11 pupils in the grade 6 (P6) and grade three (P3), respectively, followed by math (4 and 5 respectively) in the two districts. However, only 3 pupils out of 10 in Kabale preferred math while social studies was preferred by 4 pupils out of 10 in Soroti in the upper primary schools. The reason for choice or preference of subjects was that these were very simple and easy to understand by the pupils. On the other hand, science was the least preferred subject (i.e., only one pupil expressed interest in science as a subject) by the pupils in the two districts and this probably explains the reason why science subjects used to be offered by few in upper class at higher levels before they were made compulsory.
Pupil/teacher ratio
The overall pupil/teacher ratio in Uganda has maintained between 1:48 and 1:53 over the last five years. However, the pupil/teacher ratio in Soroti district trailed above the national average for the last five years while Kabale trailed below the national average. The findings indicate that Kabale district had a very low pupil/teacher ratio of 36:1 compared to 60:1 in Soroti. This could be due to the reason that Kabale district has more teachers on the payroll. With regard to Soroti district, the pupil/teacher ratio is slightly higher than the national standard of 50:1. In terms of gender, both districts had fewer female teachers as compared to male teachers (i.e., 46% for Kabale and 42% for Soroti). The high pupil/teacher ratio creates an overload on the teacher in terms of the amount of homework and marking required by the teacher. Therefore, this brings about inefficiency on the side of the teachers affecting both teaching and learning as well as learner achievement.

Pupil/classroom ratio
The national pupil/classroom ratio has remained relatively high ranging from 72:1 to 74:1 in the last five years with that of government schools stagnating between 81:1 and 77:1. Detailed analysis of specific schools revealed that Kitedeko Primary School in Soroti had the highest number of pupils in a stream, followed by Muchahi primary school in Kabale, followed by Rock View primary school with 71 pupils, followed by Okulonyo Primary School with 66 pupils in a stream among other. These enrolment numbers are too high to allow for effective teaching and learning as well as concentration by the pupils.

Instructional materials
Availability of instructional materials is critical in the teaching and learning of pupils. According to the government policy of placing books in the hands of the pupils, schools are expected to make the textbooks accessible to the pupils at any time. Furthermore, questions were asked to the head teachers which percentage of pupils had textbooks available to them. The results indicated that 6 out of 10 pupils of both grade 3 (P3) and grade 6 (P6) in Soroti district were having difficulty in accessing the textbooks while in Kabale, only 3 out of 10 for the grade 3 (P3) and 2 out of 10 for grade 6 (P6) were having difficulty accessing the learning materials. This could be interpreted to mean that in Soroti district, the policy of placing books in the hands of the pupils is still not yet fully implemented. This is an indication of the high pupil/textbook ratio that still exists in the Ugandan primary schools and therefore, this presents a challenge in ensuring effective teaching and learning in schools.

Students’ achievement on Primary Leaving Examination (PLE)
Poor academic performance has been a concern for the MoES over the past although the Ministry is currently implementing strategies aimed at addressing performance issues. It should be noted that a number of factors affect pupil’s learning achievement. This study gathered
views and opinions of head teachers, teachers and pupils on the quality of education in regard to PLE performance as well as the factors affecting performance. It is observed that 12 out of the 20 head teachers rated the quality of education as fair, 7 rated it as good and none of the respondents rated the quality of education as very good. Therefore, a lot still desires to be done in order to achieve better quality of education. In consonance with the PLE, an index called the PLE Performance Index that shows the performance of pupils is computed. Candidates are weighted in each grade of passing with the best grade carrying a high weight and failures given weight zero. The actual weight is summed up and expressed as a ratio of the expected maximum weight attained by multiplying the highest weight with the number of candidates that was administered the exams.

To derive the PLE Performance Index, candidates are weighted in each grade of passing with the best grade carrying a high weight and failures given weight zero in order to derive the index. The actual weight is summed up and expressed as a ratio of the expected maximum weight attained by multiplying the highest weight with the number of candidates that sat the exams. The performance indexes by district are presented in the Table 1. The quality of PLE performance has remained relatively the same for the last five years. The table shows that the quality of performance in Kabale district is higher than that of Soroti for all the years reviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2005</th>
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<tr>
<td>Kabale</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soroti</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>56%</td>
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Source: UNEB (2005-2009)

8. Discussion and Conclusions

The objective of this study is to investigate the quality of education by focusing on actual classroom situation in 20 primary schools in Kabale and Soroti districts. Head teachers’, teachers’ and pupils’ school attendance in the primary school is very critical as it has a direct impact on school management and pupils’ learning. A significant number of teachers is absent throughout the course of the school term and this situation is worsened by irregular attendance of head teachers, as was the case for Kabale. Head teachers cannot be completely in control of pupil and teacher attendance when they are regularly absent. The role of head teachers in providing support and supervision to teachers and creating learner-friendly school environment remains insignificant.

Moreover, the study reported that while some teachers go to school frequently, others fail to execute their teaching duties when they are actually present. Results of this study have indicated that despite the introduction of the UPE (which was created to provide relief to
parents upon learning that their government will be taking over the payment of school fees, construction of facilities and other functions that were barring children from attending school), absenteeism is still a very big challenge in Kabale and Soroti, which has made it difficult for learners to consistently follow what their teachers are teaching over time. Most children lack the relevant scholastic materials needed for effective learning. Most parents do not provide their children with food making it difficult for them to concentrate during lessons. While the UPE has enabled the majority of pupils to attend school, they are unable to learn because of hunger and inadequate scholastic materials. All these challenges significantly contribute to poor academic performance especially in PLE.

It can therefore be concluded that the attendance patterns of head teachers, teachers and pupils significantly impact the learning achievement as well as the quality outcomes of pupils. It is believed that a pupil who attends school regularly has a high chance of performing better in class and examinations than one who absents himself/herself frequently. In addition, in a school where the head teacher and teachers are present and are executing their functions, children are most likely to perform better and have better quality outcomes.

Teacher characteristics in the teaching and learning process aid the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. The study revealed that for effective teaching and learning, teacher characteristics as well as the learning environment have a significant effect on pupil learning achievements. Teachers’ rapport is one indicator of a very good relationship between the teacher and learners. It creates a safe environment for pupils to open up and interact freely with the teachers. In addition, the way a lesson is introduced says a lot about the relationship between the teacher and learners. In both districts, teachers greeted pupils at the beginning of the lesson and in most cases, addressed the pupils by their names. The implication of this is that there is an attachment between teachers and learners and that the learning environment is friendly. In schools where teacher rapport with learners is very good, there is a possibility of good performance by the pupils, assuming other factors remain constant.

Moreover, the findings of this study indicated that although the majority of teachers are qualified, they are still weak especially in areas of preparation and following up of lesson plans and schemes of work. Teachers were reported to be having less interest in teaching and giving learners less written class work and assignments, which significantly affects the curriculum content coverage as well as student performance especially at PLE. The findings revealed that most teachers especially those in Kabale did not have a scheme of work for their classes, a situation that signifies inefficiencies in the teaching and learning of pupils in those districts.

The study indicated very high pupil-classroom ratios of over 60 in some schools, especially in the Soroti district. This situation does not provide a friendly teaching and learning environment within the classroom for the pupils due to overcrowding. It can be concluded that pupils in these schools that still have cases of large classes might be negatively affected in their learning process and eventual learning outcomes.
References


