

Analysis of Trends in Secondary School Education Enrolment and Performance for selected Rural Schools in North-Eastern Uganda

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Abstract

Globally, Governments have prioritized providing education opportunities for developing their human capital and ensuring having literate and competitive citizens. This is also the case in Uganda, where the education system progresses from Pre-Primary to Primary (seven years) to Secondary (four years) to Higher School (Two years) and to Universities and other Tertiary education institutions. This paper analyses trends in enrolment of students in selected secondary rural schools in North-Eastern Uganda. While there has been massive increase in primary education enrolment, secondary school education enrolment remains dyscimally low in the rural schools with girls recording significantly lower numbers. Moreover, the rural secondary schools record very low or poor academic performance in comparison to in other regions and urban schools. Therefore, policy interventions are needed, to a) reduce the dropout rate at primary school education level, b) increase and expand access to secondary school education in rural areas, c) promote girl education, and d) improve academic performance in rural schools so that the children progress to higher school education and other tertiary education opportunities.

Key words. Enrolment, Secondary Schools, Uganda

Résumé

À l'échelle mondiale, les gouvernements ont priorisé la fourniture d'opportunités éducatives pour développer leur capital humain et assurer la présence de citoyens alphabétisés et compétitifs. C'est également le cas en Ouganda, où le système éducatif progresse de la pré-primaire à la primaire (sept ans), au secondaire (quatre ans), au lycée (deux ans) et aux universités et autres institutions d'enseignement supérieur. Cet article analyse les tendances d'inscription des élèves dans des écoles secondaires rurales sélectionnées du nord-est de l'Ouganda. Bien qu'il y ait eu une augmentation massive des inscriptions à l'éducation primaire, les inscriptions à l'école secondaire restent décimalement faibles dans les écoles rurales, avec des chiffres significativement plus bas pour les filles. De plus, les écoles secondaires rurales enregistrent des performances académiques très faibles ou médiocres par rapport à d'autres régions et écoles urbaines. Par conséquent, des interventions politiques sont nécessaires pour : a) réduire le taux d'abandon au niveau de l'enseignement primaire, b) augmenter et élargir l'accès à l'enseignement secondaire dans les zones rurales, c) promouvoir l'éducation des filles, et d) améliorer les performances académiques dans les écoles rurales afin que les enfants progressent vers l'enseignement supérieur et d'autres opportunités d'enseignement tertiaire.

Mots-clés : Inscription, Écoles secondaires, Ouganda

Background

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 2030 agenda highlights the need for access to education for all which goes beyond physical infrastructure, to ensuring equitable and equal access to quality education. While significant progress has been made over the recent years, a backlog still exists in the provision of education to all sectors of society. Issues include universal access, the impact of conflict and health crises on attendance, the lower participation of marginalised groups and people (disproportionately lower engagement of marginalised populations), and gender disparities (approximately 3% more boys than girls enrolled in primary schools). For instance, in Sub Saharan Africa, secondary education Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) is as low as 6% for countries such as Somalia and 11% in South Sudan compared to global averages above 90%.

Education as a cornerstone for sustainable development. It creates new knowledge, teaches specific skills and promotes core values like freedom, tolerance and dignity. It builds the basis for qualified human capital and professionals, which provide the workforce for driving national economies. Under the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, Target 4.3 states that, by 2030, countries should provide equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and higher education, including university. Achieving this target will facilitate the achievement not only of SDG4 but also of all other SDGs.

Limited access to education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite most African Governments' efforts to increase access to education, most children and youths, unfortunately have not had access to school over the last decades. Africa has the world's lowest secondary school enrolment rates. Only 28 percent of youth are enrolled in secondary school, leaving over 90 million teenagers struggling for employment in low-paid, informal sector jobs. For example, the secondary School Gross Enrolment Ratio remains less than 20% for Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi in comparison to over 90% in the developed countries. For higher education, the gross enrolment ratio ranges from an average of 8% in sub-Saharan Africa to 75% in Europe and Northern America. As a result, Sub-Saharan Africa currently only captures less than half of its human capital potential, which translates into a huge loss, since more than 60% of its population is under the age of 25. As one of the youngest populations in the world, it is imperative that adequate investments are made in increasing access to education for children and youth in Africa, to equip them with the literacy, numeracy and wider relevant skills to realize their potential – and generate jobs, innovation and economic growth.

In Uganda, despite the different strategies and frameworks in place, the education landscape (especially, secondary and post-secondary sector) is faced with several growing challenges due to the exponential youth population growth: (i) poor quality and relevance of training; (ii) limited access to training opportunities; (iii) skills mismatch; and (iv) inequality and disparities due to conflicts. The disparities and inequalities across social classes following years of political instability have negatively affected access of youths to quality secondary and university education, posing challenges in sustaining education for the benefit of present and future generations. As a result, youth from disadvantaged communities in Uganda, are in a vulnerable state in the labour market, many of them lacking the skills, work experience, job-search abilities and financial resources to find employment.

Rationale for the Study. Based on the above, and the need for inclusive development, there is need

to enhance access to education for all, paying particular attention to marginalized and underserved communities. This is because education is a key enabler and equalizer for developing one's potential and competitiveness. In Uganda, there are marked discrepancies in development, with North and Eastern Uganda recording the highest poverty levels and both limited access to education and generally poor performance in Schools. In 1997, the Government of Uganda launched Universal Primary Education and in 2006 Universal Secondary Education Programs, as part of efforts to broaden access to education. The main purpose of this paper is to examine students' enrolment in some of the rural secondary schools with the aim of informing design of future interventions to support education development in the target areas and other similar communities.

Study Approach

This paper is based on data obtained from selected Schools in five districts of North Eastern Uganda (Amolotar, Dokolo, Kaberamaido, Kalaki and Orungo). These districts lie in one of the most impoverished zones of Uganda and the population is basically rural. It is in this zone where the Research and Education Agency (RAE) is putting effort to promote increased access to basic education for the communities. The schools targeted are the main schools in the study districts. The data are based on School records and the performance based on national records. Comparative secondary data were obtained from the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports Fact Sheets, and data presented for Primary School enrolment trends in Adipala *et al.* (2023) and Uganda Education Enrolment Trend in Adipala and Ekimwere (2023).

Findings and Discussion

Data in Table 1 for Agwata Secondary School in Dokolo District show an increase in students enrolment from 2016 (266 students) to 911 students in 2023. The increase is true for both boys and girls but with girls recording significantly lower numbers in comparison to boys. While there was also increase in students' numbers at Amolotar Secondary School in Amolotar (Table 2), the numbers for 2022 are higher than for 2023 most probably because of more students resuming studies after the 2020-2021 Covid 19 epidemic. In this School there were significantly fewer girls than boys in all the five years (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023)

For Orungo High School (Table 3), there were overall relatively few students in the school, again with notably fewer girls than boys, but with increasing trend in enrolment especially for 2020 but a marked decline in 2023. Data are also presented for two schools in Kalaki District, Adipala High School (AHS) in Table 4 and Kalaki Secondary School (Table 5), the first being private owned and the second government owned. Table 4 shows that at AHS, there has been significant increases in students' enrolment, from 386 in 2016 to 610 in 2023, but again with fewer girls than boys. There were no records for 2021 because of the Covid 19 epidemic. For Kalaki Secondary School, data are presented only for 2023. While the students number (871) for the Year 2023 is higher than at AHS (661) there were still fewer female students than boys with markedly few students in the Higher School Section. The Kalaki Secondary School data provide a glimpse into the teacher population being 30 for the 871 students, of whom eight are part times. Also there are only a few female teachers.

No enrolment data were provided for St Thomas Girls Secondary School in Kaberamaido but data

for School Academic Performance in the National Examination show that only a few students sat O level and A level Exams (Table 6). The School performance is average as is the case with the other four Schools, implying that only very few students qualify for Higher School and indeed University Education.

Overall, the findings indicate increased enrolment of students in Secondary Schools, but at a far lower rate than at the national level (Table 7). Moreover the students' performance at both secondary and Higher School levels are quite poor (Tables 1b, 2b, 3b, 4b, 4c and 5b.), meaning that only a few students proceed from Secondary to Higher School (Pre-University) education, where again the performance is very poor. This trend, if not addressed will continue to increase marginalization of the affected areas and similar disadvantaged communities and demographics.

In Uganda, the implementation of the Universal Primary Education since 1997 provided training opportunities to many Ugandan children (enrolment rate rose from 53.1% in 1990 to 94.2% in 1998). It has not only increased the number of primary school leaving students, but also the demand for low-cost access to secondary education. Despite the initiation and implementation of Universal Secondary School Education at lower secondary level (whereby the Government subsidized selected costs in secondary schools), several challenges and constraints have remained unsolved, and Uganda is still performing below the sub-Saharan Africa average with little indication of sustainable and sufficient improvements in net enrolments. Moreover, there is a high drop rate at primary school level (over 70%) meaning only about 30% proceed to secondary education, more so for girls (see Adipala *et al.*, 2023 and Adipala and Ekimwere, 2023, this Volume). As such Ugandan youth (national definition, 18-30 years) unemployment rates are very high (64% according to Uganda Bureau of Statistics). Universities and employers' express complaint about the low level of knowledge by students having finished their secondary education. As this appears to be a growing trend, universities and employers often introduce short courses to upskilling their basic knowledge. Therefore efforts should not only aim at increasing access to education for rural communities but also bridging the gap between the outcomes of secondary school education and the life hereafter. The current thrust of strengthening and increasing access to Technical and Vocation Education Training (TVET) need to be intensified and scaled up, while promoting inclusivity.

For Uganda, some of the constraints faced at the primary and secondary education levels are: (i) lack of qualified teachers; (ii) low education standards; (iii) practice of outdated and inadequate learning methods; (iv) budgetary reductions; (v) congested classrooms and low teacher morale (pupil classroom ratio from 72:1 in 2007 to 63:1 in 2015); (vi) inadequate infrastructure – schools, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and computer labs. For example, the automation and computerisation of work requires that the students are well equipped with IT skills necessary for not only increasing their employability, but also innovativeness and creativity necessary for job creation. Because of this inadequate infrastructure there are some partnerships with over 500 private schools, but the system is fraught with problems: inadequate teaching space and materials and shortage of qualified teachers and innovative pedagogical approaches. These challenges lead to reduced students' performance and have repercussions on the graduate fitness for the job availability which is already not enough (every year, more than 40,000 young people graduate from Ugandan universities and compete for only 8,000 formal jobs).

These are aspects that need policy attention.

Table 1. Agwata Secondary School Enrolment

YEAR	GENDER	CLASS LEVEL (SENIOR 1-6)						TOTAL	GRAND TOTAL
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
2023	Male	142	137	125	79	64	75	622	911
	Female	64	81	62	38	23	21	289	
2022	Male	130	139	120	76	67	38	570	839
	Female	69	74	58	43	17	08	269	
2021	Male	110	123	119	123	49	30	554	768
	Female	51	62	47	32	14	08	214	
2020	Male	87	35	98	80	10	40	350	598
	Female	67	38	72	61	04	06	248	
2019	Male	28	29	73	51	04	11	169	359
	Female	29	24	64	42	03	04	166	
2018	Male	23	30	53	42	06	08	162	284
	Female	14	20	47	37	01	03	122	
2017	Male	21	31	49	36	07	06	150	266
	Female	19	20	41	31	02	03	116	

Table 2. Students Enrollment at Amolatar Secondary School

2023	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
S.1	41	32	73
S.2	55	37	92
S.3	53	43	96
S.4	76	44	120
S.5	09	06	15
S.6	08	04	12
GRAND TOTAL			408
2022	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
S.1	96	82	178
S.2	68	39	107
S.3	93	45	138
S.4	79	41	120
S.5	11	07	18
S.6	0	0	00
GRAND TOTAL			561
2020	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
S.1	58	46	104
S.2	83	51	134
S.3	78	44	122
S.4	46	27	73
S.5	0	0	00
S.6	0	0	00
GRAND TOTAL			433
2019	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
S.1	47	34	71
S.2	33	25	58
S.3	26	17	43
S.4	38	28	66
S.5	0	0	00
S.6	0	0	00
GRAND TOTAL			238

Table 3. Students Enrollment at Orungo High School

2017

CLASS	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
S.1	62	33	105
S.2	51	28	79
S.3	47	19	66
S.4	56	54	120
S.5	08	05	13
S.6	08	05	13
TOTAL			396

2018

CLASS	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
S.1	56	21	77
S.2	48	23	71
S.3	37	17	54
S.4	72	48	120
S.5			
S.6			
TOTAL			322

2019

CLASS	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
S.1	78	43	121
S.2	61	47	108
S.3	41	30	71
S.4	76	44	120
S.5			
S.6			
TOTAL			419

2020

CLASS	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
S.1	83	51	134
S.2	72	44	116
S.3	55	41	96
S.4	82	38	120
S.5			
S.6			
TOTAL			466

2023

CLASS	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
S.1	82	56	138
S.2	49	42	91
S.3	60	47	107
S.4	45	27	72
S.5			
S.6			
TOTAL	326	172	408

Table 4a: Students Enrollment at Adipala High School, 2016-2023

YEAR	GENDER	CLASS LEVEL (SENIOR 1-6)						TOTAL	GRAND TOTAL
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
2023	MALE	65	68	44	54	85	79	395	610
	FEMALE	41	33	35	32	31	43	215	
2022	MALE	43	42	42	36	83	73	319	491
	FEMALE	41	24	28	28	31	20	172	
2021	MALE	36	43	48	-	41	-	168	269
	FEMALE	30	25	29	-	17	-	101	
2020	MALE	40	47	38	44	22	50	241	408
	FEMALE	29	34	34	35	16	19	167	
2019	MALE	50	42	40	49	35	41	257	414
	FEMALE	22	34	34	43	14	12	157	
2018	MALE	36	37	42	65	34	13	227	365
	FEMALE	31	26	27	38	11	05	138	
2017	MALE	31	34	55	58	09	13	200	339
	FEMALE	23	23	47	37	04	05	139	
2016	MALE	31	78	64	46	10	13	242	386
	FEMALE	22	43	31	39	05	04	144	

Table 4b. Comparative Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) Results for the last six (6) years at Adipala High School

YEAR	1 ST GRADE	2 ND GRADE	3 RD GRADE	4 TH GRADE	7 TH GRADE	9 TH GRADE	ABSENT	TOTAL No. students
2022	02	23	24	12	00	02	01	64
2020	01	24	30	21	00	02	00	78
2019	01	22	32	31	00	06	00	92
2018	04	24	39	35	00	01	00	103
2017	06	16	51	21	00	00	01	95
2016	06	19	35	21	00	03	01	85

Table 4c. Comparative Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) Results for the last six (6) years at Adipala High School

REQUIRED POINTS	POINTS SCORED					
	2022	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
20						
19						
18						
17	01					
16	01	01				
15	03	01				
14	01	02	01			
13	05	01				
12	05	01	02			02

11	07	05	01			
10	05	02	05	01	01	02
09	09	07	08	03	-	01
08	08	10	08	03	02	02
07	03	11	07	01	-	05
06	10	06	05	02	02	01
05	05	02	09	01	05	01
04	09	09	05	02	03	02
03	02	11	01	01	01	
02	01	02	-	01	03	01
01	01	01	01	-	-	-
00	01	01	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	93	73	53	18	18	17

Table 5a: Students Enrolment at Kalaki Secondary School in 2023

CLASS	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
S.1	134	95	229
S.2	130	70	200
S.3	99	46	145
S.4	148	86	234
S.5	20	08	28
S.6	31	04	35
TOTAL	562	309	871

Table 5b. Staff Enrolment at Kalaki Secondary School in 2023

GOVERNMENT TEACHERS	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
	18	04	22
Parents Teachers Association (PTA) paid Teachers	08	00	08
TOTAL	26	04	30

Table 6. Comparative School Examination performance for the last six years at ST. Thomas Girls' Secondary School in Kaberamaido

Comparative UCE Results for the last six (6) years

YEAR	1ST GRADE	2ND GRAD E	3RD GRADE	4TH GRADE	7TH GRADE	9TH GRADE	ABSENT	TOTAL No. stu- dents
2022	02	22	39	38	00	06	02	109
2020	03	30	40	20	00	00	00	93
2019	04	21	44	30	00	00	00	99
2018	02	18	27	25	00	02	01	75
2017	04	28	19	19	00	01	00	71
2016	01	06	18	22	00	07	00	49

Comparative UACE Results for the last six (6) years

REQUIRED POINTS	POINTS SCORED					
	2022	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
20						
19						
18						
17						
16						
15						
14						
13						
12						
11						
10		01				
09						
08						
07		01				
06	02					
05	01					
04	01					
03	01					
02						
01	01					
00						
TOTAL No. Students	06	02				

Table 7. Gross Students Enrolment for two comparative periods in Uganda

Level	2016/17	2019/20	Percentage
Early Childhood Education	477,087 Male: 236,248 Female: 240,839	2,029,451 Male: 1,008,500 Female: 1,020,951	325%
Primary	8,264,317 Male: 4,122,663 Female: 4,141,654	10,766,994 Male: 5,345,245 Female: 5,421,749	30%
Secondary	1,452,287 Male: 762,987 Female: 689,300	1,992,315 Male: 1,004,524 Female: 987,791	36%
Post-primary institutions	126,878 Male: 68,250 Female: 58,628	129,599 Male: 70,248 Female: 59,351	2%

Source Education fact sheet Ministry of Education and Sport (see also Adipala *et al.* 2023; Adipala and Ekimwere, 2023)

Conclusion and Recommendation

Consistent with the national statistics presented in Table 7, the findings of this study show that there has been overall increase in students' enrolment at Secondary and indeed Higher School Education levels in Uganda. This is a positive trend which needs to be sustained. However, the numbers of girl students remain low requiring targeted interventions. Further the academic performance remain relatively poor in all the five districts, implying that very few of the students will proceed to University education. The other notable positive trend is that unlike at Primary School Education level where there is extremely high dropout rate (>70%; see Adipala *et al.*, 2023)), students numbers remain mostly the same over the four years of secondary education. Future thrusts need to focus on increasing enrolment at Secondary School level, improving quality of education

(academic performance and strengthening life-long skill development), and increasing enrolment of female students and recruitment of female teachers. Efforts should also be made to institute and strengthen digital learning and improving infrastructure in rural schools.

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