

Universalization, Sustainability and “Justiceness” of Primary Education: Perspectives and Lessons from Uganda

James Kyambadde and Shuti Steph Khumalo
University of South Africa, South Africa

Abstract

It is through education that communities and governments can tackle political, economic, social and geographic inequalities and ills in the continent of Africa. It is for this reason that policies like the Universal Primary Education were adopted. Children have the right to basic quality education as espoused in several agreements such as the Convention of Childrens Rights of 1989 and the Sustainable Development goals. Access to quality education for success is a social justice trajectory and promotes social justice principles. This article was intended to examine the impediments in the effective implementation of Universal Primary Education policy in Uganda. The authors view the identified impediments as social injustice practices. In exploring the phenomenon, this study deployed a qualitative research approach within a constructivist paradigm. The authors located their thesis within Rawl’s perspective of social justice. This theoretical lens is fundamental and apposite in education in that social justice theorists believe that schools as social systems should create opportunities for inclusive and enabling schooling environments, and in addition provide quality education for students. This study is of great significance in that it contributes to the epistemology in the discipline of the management of universal primary education. The study yielded critical findings which can be summarized as follows: limited capitation grants, demotivated teachers, challenges related to stakeholder collaboration and coordination, communication, cooperation, engagement and consultation.

Keywords: Universal primary education, social justice, John Rawls, stakeholder collaboration, stakeholder coordination, local government representative

Introduction

In 1997, the Government of Uganda (GoU) introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy that abolished the payment of primary education enrolment fees in all government-aided schools (Kan & Klasen, 2021; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2017; Burlando & Bbaale, 2018; Sakaue, 2018). From the late 1990s, education in East Africa started to be appraised on the basis of enrolment. The universalisation of primary education that started in Uganda in 1997 and peaked up in Tanzania in 2002, as well as in Kenya in 2003, was politicised as the epitome of education reform (Mugo, Ruto, Nakabugo & Mgalla, 2015). The Ugandan government implemented UPE policy in order to ensure that the minimum necessary facilities and resources are available to all

Ugandan children of school going age to enable them to enrol in school, remain in school and successfully complete the primary cycle of education (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017; Ugandan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The government intended to alleviate social ills such as poverty through the implementation of UPE. Datzberger (2018) posits that education serves as uncontested development strategy to tackle several forms of social, political, economic and geographic inequalities in low- and middle-income countries.

The UPE programme was associated with a dramatic increase in primary school enrolments and attendance (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017). Inequalities in attendance related to income, gender, and region were reduced, and school fees paid by parents at primary level decreased, but not at secondary and higher education levels (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017). However, despite all the alleged benefits associated with the UPE education policy, empirical evidence suggests that the implementation of the UPE policy has been poor both at school and at government/district levels. As a result, UPE has instead caused the opposite of what it intended to solve: students are still charged school fees at primary school level; there are many unqualified teachers; a shortage of qualified teachers and a lack of school materials; there is a general decline in the quality of education, continued illiteracy, gender inequality in terms of access still persists and an increase in school dropout rates (Sakaue, 2018; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017; World Bank, 2018). All the identified challenges point to evidence which suggests the promotion of socially unjust practices, as defined by social justice theorist Rawls (1971). The Sustainable Development Goals promoted by United Nations (UN) advocate that education is a fundamental right for human beings, and free universal primary education should be accessible to all regardless of gender or country of origin (Sengupta & Blessinger, 2021).

Since the education reforms require many consultations with various stakeholders, due to limited or no consultations, some schools have ignored, refused and in most cases only applied some of the UPE educational policy directives (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017). The macro-politics of educational policy change in Uganda has thus been caught in the micro-politics of the school system. There is empirical evidence that suggest that the current planning and organising framework is impeding the efficiency of UPE policy implementation in Ugandan primary schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017; World Bank, 2018). Poor planning, coordination and management at government level coupled with mismanagement of funds and resources at the district level and poor implementation at the school level are significantly undermining the UPE educational objectives and educational reforms in Uganda (World Bank, 2018).

This research therefore seeks to investigate and understand how the implementation of UPE policy in Ugandan primary schools is managed, and, furthermore, whether through the implementation of UPE policy prescriptions in Ugandan primary schools, the GoU has managed to achieve its intended educational objectives and educational externalities, thus promoting the principles of social justice. The researchers further argue that failure to provide access to all primary school going children is socially unjust and unfair. The United Nations 2030 agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) envisions a future of inclusive equity, justice and prosperity and places an important emphasis on education as stated in Goal 4. These principles which links with the Universal Primary Education policy promotes the justice course. Access to quality public education is a justice principle particularly in social systems

such as schools (Rawls, 1971). Khumalo (2019) maintains that social systems such as the schooling system are duty bound to ensure that they dispense justice, fairness, and equity to those who deserve such. Khumalo (2021) further maintains that enhancing sustainability in primary schools is fundamental because they are the building blocks in any education system. For Rawls (1971), education is a public good and cannot be commodified.

The Challenging State of Affairs of the UPE Policy in Uganda

Since its inception in 1997, UPE policy implementation in Ugandan primary schools has continued to experience a lot of challenges (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017; World Bank, 2018; Sakaue, 2018). In an attempt to overcome these challenges, the GoU has undertaken various initiatives to make the UPE policy implementation in Ugandan primary schools efficient and thus achieve its goal (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017).

Because UPE policy was more of an outcome of a political demand rather than rational planning, it was implemented without time for detailed planning and in the absence of sufficient data (Avenstrup, Liang & Nellesmann, 2004; Burlando & Bbaale, 2018; Sawamura, 2020). There was considerable scepticism for potential problems of sustainability, financing, and quality of education. The researchers believe that this scepticism is validated by the current UPE system situation. Motivated to a great extent by politics, the government carried out a nationwide enumeration operation and committed itself to providing tuition fees for four children per family, basic physical facilities, instructional materials and teachers' salaries and training (Avenstrup et al., 2004). This led to gross primary enrolment rate rise from 5.3 million in 1997 to 8.4 million pupils in 2014 (Ugandan Bureau of Statistics, 2014; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015).

Due to a lack of preparations to mobilise funding, make adequate budgetary preparations and undertake the required structural and organisational reforms to develop capacity for this massive expansion, this access shock resulted in overcrowding, a decline in quality of education, access and retention problems, lack of capacity for effective accountability of financial resources at all levels, persistent shortages in infrastructure implementation, shortages of qualified teachers and school materials and a rise in over-age students (Avenstrup et al., 2004; Huylebroeck & Titeca, 2015). Evidence suggests that these challenges are still impeding UPE policy implementation in Ugandan primary schools (World Bank, 2018; Sakaue, 2018). Thus, despite the initiatives that have been taken by the government to overcome these challenges, the implementation of UPE policy in Ugandan primary schools is still constrained and not efficient (World Bank, 2018; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017; Masuda & Yamauchi, 2018). At the school level, the micropolitics of UPE educational policy change in Uganda has ended up being caught in the micropolitics of the primary school system (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017; Sakaue, 2018).

In the policy process context, it is important to understand that "those who work in schools are not merely passive receivers and implementers of policy decisions made elsewhere" (Kelchtermans, 2007, p. 2). They tend to shape the policy process at institutional level based on their own interests. Therefore, policy development and implementation are complex and must be seen as a dialectic process in which all stakeholders will be involved in shaping its development (Waheduzzaman, Van Gramberg & Ferrer, 2018). Because education reforms require a lot of consultations

with various stake holders (Waheduzzaman et al., 2018) due to limited or no consultations, some primary schools in Uganda continue to ignore, refuse and in most cases only apply some of the UPE educational policy directives. Flowing from these discussions above, the researchers argue that the characterization of the challenges due to the UPE policy perpetuates social injustice practices.

Policy Concerns

In this section, the researchers identify and analyze the UPE policy management and implementation challenges faced by the MoES within the core functions of planning and organizing as management functions. Educational policy management and implementation ought to consider the core planning and organizing functions in policy formulation, management, and implementation. Efficient and effective management is important for the successful implementation of UPE policy in Ugandan primary schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017). Before moving forward, it is important to understand the concept of management. Management is the art of guiding situations and controlling actions in a way that yields results to enable the institution to realise its objectives (Panda, 2006). The leadership, the skills and knowledge of the leaders, and the willingness of leaders to engage with other stakeholders, are crucial factors in management especially in relation to public policy interventions (Burnet & Kanakuze, 2018; Waheduzzaman et al., 2018). This is why it is important for the MoES to ensure that all stakeholders managing and guiding the implementation of UPE policy in Uganda are well skilled, are willing to cooperate with other stakeholders and have the required knowledge in relation to their respective roles, while managing and implementing UPE policy. These variables are important in boosting stakeholder efficiency during the policy implementation process as observed in other developing countries (Waheduzzaman et al., 2018). This section substantiates the core management functions of planning and organizing, the principles, processes, general challenges, policy concerns and the benefits of the management functions vis-à-vis the management of the implementation of UPE policy in Ugandan primary schools.

Social Justice as Underpinning Theory of the Study

Various scholars define social justice differently but the common denominator to social justice is characterized by fairness and equality for all people and respect for their basic human rights (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Walton-Fisette and Sutherland (2018) argue that social justice cannot be narrowed down to a single concept but contains multiple discursive practices, thus it cannot be situated within a single essential definition. The provision of quality public education is a human right and the purpose of UPE policy was to achieve that. Failure to ensure that UPE is fully implemented to the latter amounts to social injustice. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) further maintain that a great deal of scholarship in social justice studies is focused on the gap between the ideas of social justice and the practices of social justice. The authors further refer to the use of the term critical social justice and argue that this kind of justice recognizes inequality as deeply embedded in the fabric of society. Our definition of social justice in the broader sense aligns with what Rawls (1971) advocated for, fairness and equality. Rawls (1971) principle of justice states that social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions:

first, they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the Difference Principle).

Failure by the Ugandan government authorities to implement UPE policy negate these principles cited by Rawls above and is considered a socially unjust practice. Social justice theorists are of the view that practices which do not provide access or deny access whether deliberately or not and fail to provide opportunities for educational purposes, promote injustice. The researchers are of the view that Rawls theory is relevant and useful for understanding the implementation of UPE in the Ugandan education system. Rawls is the pioneer of social justice and strongly advocated for just practices in state institutions. Thus, the Ugandan education authorities are duty bound to provide quality education services to all school going citizens irrespective of their economic and social standing. According to Rawls, education is a public good and it should be provided to all students. The economic challenges the government claims to face should not be accepted as an excuse for quality primary education delivery. Despite adopting UPE as policy for primary education massification, the Ugandan education system faces the following implementation hurdles which serve as fertile ground for social injustice: inadequate funding, structural and organizational reforms for massive expansion, overcrowding, decline in quality education, access and retention problems, infrastructural problems, overcrowding, shortages of qualified teachers and school materials. These challenges provide fertile ground for the furtherance of social injustices.

Reflections on Sustainable Development Goals and Public Quality Education

From time immemorial, the world continued to face interlinked global crises of serious proportions in different aspects of life. Amongst others, this included but not limited to the delivery of public quality academic agenda at different levels, namely primary, secondary, and higher education levels. Sachs, Lafortune, Kroll, Fuller and Woelm (2022, p. 45) posit that “sustainable development as a concept finds its roots in the balancing act of socio-economic development within ecological constraint”. For Tomislav (2021), sustainable development entails “fulfilling needs (redistribution of resources to ensure the quality of life) of the people, while ensuring inter-generational and intra-generational equity is the essence of sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which was adopted by member states of the United Nations (UN) in 2015 remain in jeopardy (Sachs, Kroll, Lafortune, Fuller & Woelm, 2022).

In 2015, the UN member states gathered to seriously reflect, analyse and confront the varied challenges faced by the different countries. In support of this assertion, Manteaw (2020, p.6) asserts that “the framing of education and learning in sustainable development has evolved out of global environment and development discussions to shape how knowledge, learning and action are applied in efforts to address complex socio-ecological and sustainability challenges of the times”. One of the critical pillars which received priority was Sustainable Development Goal number 4, which focuses on the provision of public quality education. The purpose of the study was to examine the implementation challenges of the universalization of quality public primary education. Literature unearthed several challenges related to the rolling out of UPE in Uganda.

Sustainable education not only requires teaching practices and techniques that secure strong foundations in learning (Taranto & Buchanan, 2020), but also other socially just resources such as quality classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and qualified teachers. We argue that these implementation challenges with reference to the universalization of the public quality primary education are not only in direct conflict with social justice principles but also with sustainable development goal number 4, which is the provision of public quality education. Quality public education entails the following:

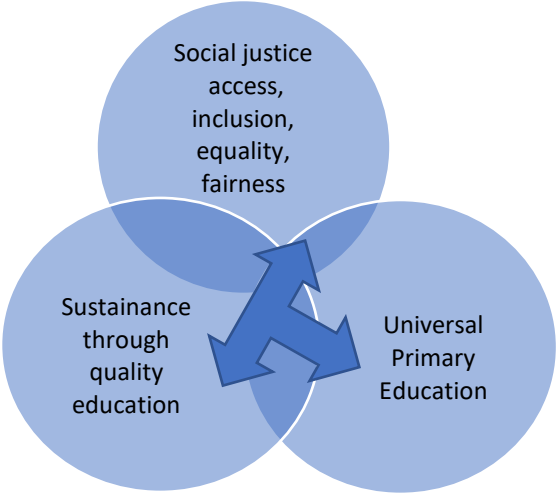
Learners who are healthy, well-nourished, and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities. Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities. Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention, and peace. Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities and finally outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society (UNICEF, 2000, p. 3).

Promoting Universal Primary Education Through Social Justice and Sustainable Development Goal 4

We argue that social justice and sustainable development goal of public quality education provision co-exist and are both critical in promoting the policy of Universal Primary Education. Equality, inclusivity, and access are fundamental principles in achieving universal primary education. As Rawls (1971) advocated that social justice principles are to satisfy two conditions namely, *first, they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the Difference Principle)*, the same can be true in our view that sustainable development goal number four of the provision of public quality education is a social justice tenet and links well with the universalization of the primary education. In simple terms, promoting the UPE policy should be underpinned by the application and interlocking of the principles of the theory of social justice as espoused by Rawls.

Figure 1 represents the triad relationship between social justice, sustainability element of public quality education and the universalization of primary education. Drawing from the comprehensive description by UNICEF (2000) of what quality education entails and the literature analysis of the plethora of challenges regarding the implementation of UPE policy, we argue that social injustice is perpetuated and the achievement of the universalization of UPE policy in Uganda is jeopardized.

Figure1
The Triad Interlock (Social Justice, Sustainability, and Universal Primary Education)



Research Methodology and Design
Research Approach

The present study examined the challenges in implementing the UPE policy in the Ugandan primary education system and how these challenges promote social injustice. In exploring this phenomenon, this study adapted a qualitative approach within the constructivist interpretivist world view. This paradigmatic stance was taken to establish clear individualistic experiences of the participants from their natural settings. These methodological choices are justified for this study since the rationale for their selection aligns with the views of Neuman (2006) and Nieuwenhuys (2009) when they maintain that in qualitative studies, researchers interact with participants from the comfort of the of their natural settings. The researchers interviewed the participants from their settings.

Sampling Procedure and Instrumentation

Research quality is not only decided by the approach and design of the study, but also by the appropriateness and the suitability of the sampling strategy that is to be adopted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to select participants because they had characteristics that matched the research objectives. As Silverman (2005) asserts, purposive sampling demands that researchers think critically about the parameters being studied and the sample should be chosen very carefully. We deployed semi-structured interviews to collect data from various units of analysis. The researchers collected data from various stakeholders (see table 1) through the deployment of semi-structured interviews. They included school principals, district officials, local government representatives, Ministry of Education and Sports officials (UPE policy unit). The interviews sought to gather data on the practices, experiences, and perspectives of the role players involved in implementing the UPE program in Uganda.

Table 1*List of Interview Schedules*

Interview schedule per participant	Participant/ Interviewee	Code
Interview 1	School Principal from UPE Primary School A	SPA
Interview 2	District official A	DEO A
Interview 3	School Principal from UPE Primary School B	SPB
Interview 4	Local Government Representative and SMC member from District A	LGRA
Interview 5	Ministry of education and sports (MoES) official	MoES A
Interview 6	School Principal from UPE Primary School C	SPC
Interview 7	Local Government Representative from District B	LGRB
Interview 8	District official from District B	DEOB
Interview 9	School Principal from UPE primary school D	SPD
Interview 10	Local Government Representative and SMC member from District B	LGRB
Interview 11	Local Government Representative and SMC member from District C	LGRC
Interview 12	School Principal from UPE primary School E	SPE
Interview 13	Local Government Representative and SMC member from District D	LGRD

Analysis, Ethical Protocol, and Credibility

In this study, the authors followed the advice of Marshall and Rossman (2005) and Paton (2016) wherein we sifted data, discovered patterns and categories to arrive at the thematic strands. The processes entailed backward and forward engagement with transcribed data. In this systematic data processing, we deployed thematic data analysis method to create themes. Our research positionality was very clear, and we conducted this process in an ethical manner to ensure that research findings are bias free. Before the study was conducted, the researchers applied for the approval to conduct the study from the university ethics committee. After we were given approval, permission was sought from the relevant education departmental authorities to enter their fields to interview the identified information rich participants. To ensure that the study is credible, we followed the strategies of Guba and Lincoln (1994) in ensuring that engagement is prolonged to gather descriptions which are thick, dependable, and confirmable.

Results of the Study

The main mandate of this research paper was to critically examine challenges in implementing the Universal Primary Education policy in Uganda. Rigorous analysis and synthesis of the transcribed data resulted in the emergence of various thematic strands. As argued and indicated earlier, we made all attempts to remain unbiased. The expressions and assertions of participants were captured verbatim, and the emerged themes are discussed below:

UPE fiscus status

The UPE implementation in Ugandan primary schools still faces non-economic and economic barriers (Sakaue, 2018; World Bank, 2018). The current level of government spending on education does not meet the funding needs of the education sector including UPE (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017; Sakaue, 2018). Most of the participants pointed to the fact that the UPE programme is facing several challenges under the current UPE planning and organising management framework that need to be attended to (Interview no. 1, 6, 10, 11 & 13). The district official, had this to say about the wage bill and UPE funding: *"The wage bill is the problem now ... The government says we don't have money. When there's no wage bill, we cannot do anything, and the government says it doesn't have money ..."* (Interview no. 2). Others stated: *"Funds are inadequate ... money is insufficient, 10000 Ugandan shillings per child per year ... Issues of budget shortfalls ... Budgeting is quarterly ..."* ... *"Capitation grants are inadequate ... fixed by the Ministry of Finance ..."* (Interview no. 13). *"The payments through the capitation grants from the government are not enough to support the school operations or requirements to effectively implement UPE policies ..."* ... *"UPE expectations cannot be met due to limited funding ..."* (Interview no. 3). *"Funds not coming on time ... no explanation provided on the delays to funding ..."* (Interview no. 1) *"... the UPE programme is so nice ... children come here and study, seat and complete ... the problem here is little funding ..."* (Interview no. 4).

The perceptions of most participants if not all, point to the fact that the issue of financial resources is the most important factor in relation to the efficient management of the implementation of UPE policy in Uganda. In relation to the challenges, most of the participants suggested that the MoES needs to facilitate the required changes to address the UPE challenges by providing more monetary and non-monetary resources especially funds to the education sector, eradicating poverty, empowering families, and providing special support for the disabled and orphans to ensure UPE management and implementation efficiency.

It is worth noting that despite the lack of funds, the education sector is the most funded sector in Uganda. This was indicated by most of the participants. Considering the participants' comments on inadequate UPE financing, according to the World Bank (2014), despite the education sector being the most funded sector in Uganda, the country still spends less on education in comparison to its neighbours. The participants argued that because inadequate funds were provided through UPE capitation grants, the financial school allocations of UPE capitation grants needed to be increased significantly and should also allow parents to contribute more to UPE for the efficient implementation of UPE. (Interview no. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, & 11). Importantly, UPE policy implementation has always been hampered by inadequate funds to meet the required implementation needs (Sakaue, 2018; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2017). All participants mentioned the lack of sufficient funding or financial resources as the biggest problem that is impeding UPE implementation in Uganda, thus rendering the UPE programme both internally and externally inefficient.

It is important to note that parental contributions in the form of tuition fees would be against the core aims of the UPE programme which is to provide free tuition primary education to all Ugandan children. All participants stated that UPE was mainly financed by the provision of UPE capitation grants by the GoU (MoES), disbursed to each UPE primary school based on the number of the students enrolled in each school (Interview

no. 1, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11 & 13). This proposition was supported by the Ministry of Education and Sports (2017).

Low Morale and Negative Attitudes

Most of the participants were of the view that UPE stakeholder performance, motivation and attitudes were not good enough especially for school level stakeholders, particularly UPE teachers (Interview no. 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, & 13). All the participants highlighted the problem of low wages, late salary payments and lack of funds as the causes of low teacher motivation, negative attitudes and poor performance with severe negative consequences for the efficiency of the entire UPE program (Interview no. 2, 4, 6, 9, 10 & 11). In this regard, one school principal narrated that *"... most teachers show up late or take up part time businesses ... due to low wages" ... "This negatively impacts their performance at school by reducing the teachers' available time ..."* (Interview no. 1).

Considering the above, participants reported that although motivation, attitude and performance problems remain, action was taken by the district education administration to motivate teachers and other UPE stakeholders. For an example, *"best five schools in PLE are rewarded ... we motivate schools to work better ... talk shows ... more involvement in the provision of quality education ..."* (Interview no. 2).

Insufficient teachers were also highlighted by the participants. A school principal narrated that *"Most teachers are in acting capacity and are not paid for the work done ... negative impact on teachers' performance, attitudes and motivation ..."* (Interview no. 1). Similarly, the school principal in a rural primary school commented that *"There's also a negative perception about the UPE education system by the community members which demotivates children sometimes"* (Interview no. 1). Furthermore, in demonstrating other causes of low motivation, negative attitudes and poor performance among UPE teachers, another school principal commented that: *"... sometimes school teachers go without lunch. However, parents try to ensure that teachers receive at least lunch at school and stay motivated and healthy to teach"* (Interview no. 11). On the other hand, another school principal had this say: *"Parents are motivating teachers by giving them lunch ..."* (Interview no. 9). In saying so, he also referred to the fact that the government was also supposed to provide financial resources for financing teachers' school meals (Interview no. 9 & 11).

Efforts are made to change parents' attitudes and to motivate parents to take their children to school and contribute to their education financially. In this regard, a participant for District A argued that: *"... now the stakeholders, we can talk of the politicians who say that these children do not belong to Museveni, they belong to you ... Partitions are very clear to the parents, that these children belong to you ... Because there was an attitude where the parents were saying that these children are for Museveni ... so support them by contributing money, by contributing something to support schools, so be involved ..."* (Interview no. 2). On motivating other UPE stakeholders in relation to UPE management and implementation, this account was given by one of the participants: *"... you know, when things are done, that's enough motivation. Then if the children pass, then that is motivation. So, like when the pupils pass like we did very well in P7 exams; so, everyone is happy, so the politicians, the district officials and everyone else they are happy ..."* (Interview no. 2).

In substantiating further, participants explained that UPE frontline stakeholders, i.e., the UPE implementers were less motivated and had more negative perception of the UPE program, than UPE stakeholders at the national level (Interview no. 1, 3, 2, 6,

18, 10 & 11). Participants argued that those at the top giving instructions did not face the same challenges as those at the implementation level and were highly paid compared to the low-paid UPE frontline stakeholders (Interview no. 1, 6, 3, 10 & 15). In this regard, a school principal said that: “... with less funds you can't pay all the teachers ... it's difficult ...” (Interview no. 3). It was evident that frontline UPE stakeholders had issues with the management of the UPE program: “the management is not good ... no funding ...” (Interview no. 1). As this study found, teachers' low motivation negatively impacts on their performance (Interview no. 1, 3, 6, 9 & 11).

Participants pointed to the low wages, late salary payments and the lack of funding that created a nightmare for frontline UPE implementers. As Datzberger (2018) argued, under good UPE management terms, teachers would require higher pay and better teaching conditions. In addition, this research revealed that UPE teachers were less motivated and had developed a negative attitude towards UPE teaching due to low wages, not being paid on time and the lack of school lunches. Burnet and Kanakuze (2018) and Waheduzzaman et al. (2018) argue that bad attitude is a liability to stakeholder performance when implementing public policies, due to lack of willingness and skills to engage with other stakeholders. Furthermore, these issues lead to less commitment, cooperation and dislike for the institution and what it stands for, with inefficiency of the entire system as a consequence (Waheduzzaman et al., 2018). In relation to UPE stakeholder performance and UPE outcomes, the World Bank (2018) and Ministry of Education and Sports (2017) contended that UPE management and implementation in Uganda was inefficient. As indicated by the World Bank (2018) and Ministry of Education and Sports (2017), it was evident that problems relating to UPE stakeholder motivation and attitudes were impeding efficient UPE stakeholder performance at the school level which directly impacts negatively on the efficiency of the UPE program.

Role Player Collaboration and Coordination Challenges

Most of the participants highlighted the importance of UPE stakeholder collaboration for the efficient management of the implementation of UPE policy (Interview no. 1, 3, 4, 6, 8 & 11). Participants identified several elements related to collaborating and cooperating with other UPE stakeholders at different levels to be able to execute their mandates (Interview no. 1, 2, 9, 10 & 13). Frontline participants pointed out that they had to collaborate and coordinate with the parents, district administration and Local Government Representatives to facilitate efficient coordination to effectively deliver UPE in their respective primary schools (Interview no. 1, 3, 10 & 11). In supporting this assertion, the district official A commented that: “The district works together with the MoES and the primary schools represented by SMC to ensure that UPE is well implemented ...” (Interview no. 2).

Participants at MoES and district level commented that they coordinated with other UPE stakeholders at the implementation levels to ensure that UPE frontline implementers had enough resources in order to successfully execute their UPE management and implementation mandates and obligations (Interview no. 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12). During the researcher's interactions with the participants, the researcher noticed that problems of UPE stakeholder collaboration and coordination were more between UPE school principals, districts and the MoES especially around securing financial resources or funding (Interview no. 1, 2, 10 & 11). On the contrary, school principals talked of successful engagements and collaboration with students and their

families (Interview no. 1, 3, 6, 10 & 13). Most of the participants were of the view that under decentralization, UPE stakeholder collaboration and coordination is vital for the efficient management of the Implementation of UPE policy in Uganda (Interview no. 1, 2, 6, 10, 11, 12 & 13).

Literature findings correlate with the above propositions indicating that the MoES coordinates and collaborates with the district and school levels officials to ensure that UPE is well implemented (Kavuma et al., 2017; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2017). This is further supported by the views of Kavuma et al. (2017) and Bitamazire (2005). Furthermore, the researchers' understanding informed by the participants' views is that because the management and implementation of UPE policy in Uganda is decentralised and takes place at three different levels of the management and implementation process, robust stakeholder collaboration, coordination and engagement is vital for efficient UPE management and implementation in Uganda.

The above assertions take into account the fact that most of the interviewee participants narrated that the current level of UPE stakeholder collaboration and coordination under the current planning and organising UPE management framework is insufficient and impeding the efficient management of UPE implementation in Uganda. Waheduzzaman et al. (2018) explains the benefits of stakeholder collaboration in boosting policy implementation efficiency. As participants also argued, poor coordination is considered to be one of the major problems impeding the successful implementation of UPE in Uganda. This is because management uses coordination to enable operational efficiency by enhancing cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders and facilitates unity and working as a whole. Despite most of the interviewees commenting on the need to collaborate and coordinate and how they collaborate with other UPE stakeholder at the different UPE management and implementation levels, it was evident that UPE stakeholder collaboration and coordination was insufficient and needed to be improved in order to address UPE management and implementation challenges especially in the area of resource allocation.

Communication Chaos

The participants commented on the important role communication plays in effective collaboration, coordination, engagement and cooperation with different UPE stakeholders in order to be able to execute their respective UPE mandates in relation to management and implementation of UPE policy (Interview no. 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 14, 11 & 12). Despite the problems related to insufficient communication while managing the implementation of UPE policy in Ugandan primary schools as some participants had narrated, participants said they always tried to communicate with their counterparts but faced many challenges (Interview no. 1, 4, 6, 10 & 13). UPE school principals commented on ineffectively communicating with the district officials and the MoES via the school management committees about the challenges they faced, but in most cases, got no positive reaction especially from the MoES (Interview no. 1, 10 & 13).

In addition, officials from the district also commented on the ineffectiveness of the current levels of communication and limited cooperation that hindered effective coordination and collaboration especially with the MoES when it came to procuring and acquiring resources needed to implement UPE at the district and school levels effectively. In this regard, the official from District A lamented that:

... the only thing that has failed is the funding. Like now when we say that we want to recruit more teachers, they don't want to give ... we are supposed to have 60 teachers appointed by the district but now we only have 16 teachers appointed ... for the recruitment of teachers there's no cooperation and whenever we want to recruit the deputies, they are not appointed ... that one also brings low morale ... the wage bill is also a problem now ... the government says we don't have the money ... (Interview no. 2).

The different messages on UPE policy by the politicians were also points of concern for the participants (Interview no. 1, 3, 6 & 13). A UPE school principal participant narrated that: *"... one politician says this about parental financial contributions and the other one says something different ... very confusing ..."* (Interview no. 3). Poor communication between UPE stakeholders and the politicians who wanted to politicize the UPE programme for political gain and control its funding was evident when the views of a participating UPE school principal were captured as follows *"... we have a problem of contradicting information from politicians ... e.g., politicians saying no one should contribute anything to UPE, yet there isn't enough funding provided ..."* (Interview no. 3).

It was evident that insufficient UPE stakeholder communication in the context of collaboration, coordination, and cooperation between UPE stakeholders was a great concern to the participants (Interview no. 1, 3, 6 & 11). According to literature review findings, for successful management of the implementation of public policy prescriptions, the importance of robust and effective stakeholder communication while managing the implementation of public policies is vital. In support of the findings above, the Ministry of Education and Sports (2017) posits that the ministry uses communication as an organizing management function to engage, collaborate, cooperate and coordinate the stakeholders at the district and school levels while managing the implementation of UPE policy in Uganda. The findings of this research are important in relation to prioritizing and improving the key UPE management variables listed above in the context of UPE policy implementation management under the current UPE planning and organizing management framework. Therefore, as highlighted by the interviewees, for the successful management of the implementation of UPE in Ugandan primary schools, communication and cooperation need to be put at the centre of the current UPE planning and organizing, management and implementation framework. Flowing from the assertions above, it is evident that communication and cooperation between UPE stakeholders is inadequate and negatively affects the implementation to the UPE programme in Uganda.

Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation

Most of the stakeholders interviewed, especially at the school and district levels, complained about not being consulted on formulating UPE policies (Interview no. 1, 2, 3, 6, 10 & 11). To support this view, a frontline UPE participant asserted:

hmmm ... failure to implement the directives, you get penalized by the district; they set policies without involving the implementors, so you find that most of the policies are out of touch and not implementable ... e.g., someone sits in Kampala and sets a policy without knowing the situation they face ... (Interview no. 1).

Almost all the participant school principals said they made sure they involved all stakeholders to facilitate efficient implementation of UPE policies in their respective primary schools but faced some challenges. However, some interviewees from the school level, contradicted the principals and argued that they are not consulted and engaged when UPE policies are being formulated and that district and MoES officials are also in most cases not attending to their specific school needs. It is also important to note that district officials also complained about not being engaged and listened to by the MoES officials in relation to their district demands. A school level participant commented that: *"... I involve stakeholders in implementing UPE and stakeholders come twice a week to supervise the school ..."* (Interview no. 1).

Literature review findings support the above participant views. In demonstrating this, Bitamazire (2005) and Yan; Obeng-Odoom, Wamalwa, Munk, Buckarie and Ugochukwu (2007) postulated that MoES is the main actor and determinant of national policy and works in cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and communication with the local councils and districts officers (CAOs), parliament members, school management committee members, head teachers, founding bodies and NGOs. This indicates that the current UPE planning and organising framework needs to be improved and is not efficient (World Bank, 2018). Therefore, a proper planning and organising roadmap needs to be drafted, taking into account all the organising factors which involve delegation of authority, specialisation, robust communication, coordination, centralisation and decentralisation, division of labour and span of control.

Conclusion

This paper explored the challenges that are faced in implementing the UPE policy in Uganda. These results are significant and contribute towards the available knowledge in the field of education management. In conducting this research, we used social justice as a theoretical lens and its relation to sustainable development goal of the provision of public quality education and further analysed and synthesized rigorously the extant scholarly work. It is clear from the discussions above that the implementation of the universalization of primary education in Uganda is rippled with what can be characterized as insurmountable and unparalleled impediments. The findings of the scholarship review are largely corroborated by the empirical results of the study summarized as follows: limited capitation grants, demotivated teachers, challenges related to stakeholder collaboration and coordination, communication, cooperation, engagement and consultation. These challenges are unjust and unfair to the students who are justified to receive public quality education and render the goal of the vision (of SDG number 4) impossible. As authors, we argue that the findings negate the principles of Rawls theory of justice because the public quality education is compromised through the mismanagement of the implementation of the universal education policy.

References

- Annan-Diab, F., & Molinari, C. (2017). Interdisciplinarity: Practical approach to advancing education for sustainability and for the Sustainable Development Goals. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 15(2), 73-83.
- Avenstrup, R., Liang, X., & Nellemann, S. (2004). *Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi and Uganda: Universal primary education and poverty reduction*. <http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/reducingpoverty/case/58/fullcase/East%20Africa%20Edu%20Full%20Case.pdf> [Accessed 10 July 2017].
- Bitamazire, N.G. (2005). *Status of education for the rural people in Uganda*. Kampala: MoES.
- Burlando, A., & Bbaale, E. (2018). *Fertility responses to schooling costs: Evidence from Uganda's universal primary education policy* https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=329033.
- Burnet, J.E., & Kanakuze, J. d'A. (2018). Political settlements, women's representation, and gender equality: The 2008 gender-based violence law and gender parity in primary and secondary education in Rwanda. *ESID Working Paper No. 94*. Manchester: The University of Manchester.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2005). *Research methods in education*. (5th Eds). Routledge: Farmer.
- Datzberger, S. (2018). Why education is not helping the poor. Findings from Uganda. *World development*, 110, 124-139.
- Huylebroeck, L., & Titeca, K. (2015). Universal Secondary Education (USE) in Uganda: blessing or curse? The impact of USE on educational attainment and performance. In Reyntjens, F. et al. *L'Afrique des grands lacs: annuaire 2014-2015* (pp. 349-372).
- Kan, S., & Klasen, S. (2021). Evaluating universal primary education in Uganda: School fee abolition and educational outcomes. *Review of Development Economics*, 25(1), 116-147.
- Khumalo, S.S. (2019). Analyzing abusive school leadership practices through the lens of social justice. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 33(4), 546-555.
- Khumalo, S. S. (2021). A descriptive analysis of the leadership practices of primary school principals in promoting sustainability through motivating teachers. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 12(1), 42-54.
- Kavuma, N. S., Cunningham, K., Bogere, G., & Sebaggala, R. (2017). Assessment of public expenditure governance of the universal primary education program in Uganda. *ACODE Policy Research Series, No. 80*. Kampala: Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment.
- Kelchtermans, G. (2007). Macro-politics caught up in micropolitics: the case of the policy on quality control in Flanders (Belgium). *Journal of Education Policy*, 22(4), 471-491. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680930701390669>
- Kioupi, V., & Voulvoulis, N. (2019). Education for sustainable development: A systemic framework for connecting the SDGs to educational outcomes. *Sustainability*, 11(21), 6104.
- Guba, E.Y.L., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). *Competing paradigms in qualitative research. Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Manteaw, B.O. (2020). Education and learning in sustainable development: Foregrounding an emergent discourse. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 11(2), 5-19.

- Masuda, K., & Yamauchi, C. (2018). *The effects of universal secondary education program accompanying public-private partnership on student access, sorting and achievement: evidence from Uganda. Technical Report*. Tokyo: Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2014). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage publications.
- Ministry of Education and Sports. (2017). *The education and sports sector national annual performance report*. Kampala: MoES.
- Mugabe, R., & Ogina, T. A. (2021). Monitoring and implementation of universal primary education (UPE) in Uganda. *The Education Systems of Africa*, 187-209.
- Mugo, J. K., Ruto, S. J., Nakabugo, M. G., & Mgalla, Z. (2015). A call to learning focus in East Africa: Uwezo's measurement of learning in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. *Africa Education Review*, 12(1), 48-66.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2008). Qualitative research designs and data gathering techniques. In Maree, K. (Ed.). *First steps in research* (pp.70-92) Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Neuman, W.L. (2006). *Basic of social research: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. (2nd Eds.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Panda, S. (2006). *Planning and management in distance education*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. (3rd Eds.). Sage.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice* (Revised Ed.). Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Sachs, J., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., & Woelm, F. (2022). *Sustainable development report*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sachs, J., Lafortune, G., Kroll, C., Fuller, G., & Woelm, F. (2022). *Sustainable Development Report 2022–From Crisis to Sustainable Development: the SDGs as Roadmap to 2030 and Beyond*. https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/6F9DFE9C71145A53D1B3A440575DA0CD/9781009210089pre_i-ii.pdf/frontmatter.pdf
- Sakaue, K. (2018). *Informal fee charge and school choice under a free primary education policy: Panel data evidence from rural Uganda* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.02.008>
- Sawamura, N. (2020). Universal primary education in Africa: Facets and meanings. *The Palgrave Handbook of African Education and Indigenous Knowledge*, 637-655.
- Sengupta, E., & Blessinger, P. (2021). Introduction to international perspectives in social justice programs at the institutional and community levels. In *International perspectives in social justice programs at the institutional and community levels* (pp. 3-11). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. Teachers College Press.
- Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. London: SAGE.
- Taranto, D., & Buchanan, M. T. (2020). Sustaining lifelong learning: A self-regulated learning (SRL) approach. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 11(1), 5-15.
- Tomislav, K. (2018). The concept of sustainable development: From its beginning to the contemporary issues. *Zagreb International Review of Economics & Business*, 21(1), 67-94.
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2014). *National population housing census report 2014*. Kampala: Uganda.

- Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2017). *The National population and housing census 2014 – Education in the thematic report series*. Kampala: Uganda.
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2018). *Statistical abstract*. Kampala: Government of Uganda.
- UNICEF (2000). *Defining quality in education, A paper presented by UNICEF at the meeting of the international working group on education Florence, Italy June 2000*.
- UNESCO. (2015). *A growing number of children and adolescents are out of school as aid fails to meet the mark, Policy Paper 22 /Fact Sheet 31*, Quebec: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).
- Yan, T., Obeng-Odoom, F., Wamalwa, F., Munk, A., Buckarie, M., & Ugochukwu, I. (2007). *Poverty reduction and education decentralization in Uganda*. <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/courses/2007%20Fieldtrip/Educator%20Decentralisation.pdf>
- Waheduzzaman, W., Van Gramberg, B., & Ferrer, J. (2018). Bureaucratic readiness in managing local level participatory governance: a developing country context, *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 77 (2), 309-330. doi: 10.1111/1467-8500.12256.
- Walton-Fisette, J. L., & Sutherland, S. (2018). Moving forward with social justice education in physical education teacher education. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 23(5), 461-468.
- World Bank. (2018). *World development report. Learning to realize education's promise*. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>

All correspondence related to this article should be addressed to corresponding author: Shuti Steph Khumalo, University of South Africa, South Africa.
E -mail: ekhumass@unisa.ac.za.