

UNIVERSAL SECONDARY EDUCATION IN UGANDA: BLESSING OR CURSE? THE IMPACT OF USE ON EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND PERFORMANCE

by Lisa Huylebroeck and Kristof Titeca

Résumé

Suite à la politique de scolarisation primaire universelle (SPU), le gouvernement de l'Ouganda a introduit sa politique de scolarisation secondaire universelle (SSU) en 2007 afin d'améliorer l'accès à l'éducation secondaire de qualité pour les familles économiquement vulnérables. Alors que les effets de la SPU ont été largement analysés, ce n'est pas le cas pour la SSU. En utilisant des données quantitatives et qualitatives, cet article vise à analyser l'impact de la SSU sur les réalisations et les performances éducatives. L'article montre que l'impact de l'utilisation est mitigé, que l'augmentation du niveau de scolarité est restée lente et que les performances éducatives ont même diminué après la mise en œuvre de la SSU. Il est expliqué comment la SSU joue un rôle essentiellement politique, en raison de quoi l'amélioration réelle de la prestation de service est secondaire. Cela conduit à une situation dans laquelle les salles de classe surencombrées et une réduction de la rémunération des enseignants sont des éléments clés. Ceci affecte négativement la motivation des acteurs et généralement la performance scolaire. Bien que la SSU ait été conçue avec la coresponsabilité des parents, des écoles et surtout du gouvernement, la politique a été mise en œuvre sans une attention suffisante aux réalités scolaires locales. Par conséquent, le but de la SSU d'augmenter l'accès à une éducation de qualité n'a pas été atteint à ce jour.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2007 the Government of Uganda introduced its 'Universal Post Primary Education and Training policy', commonly known as Universal Secondary Education (USE), to increase access to secondary education for economically vulnerable families and communities.¹ Uganda was one of the first African countries to implement Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the 1990s² and is now the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to embark on Universal Secondary Education.³ A number of reasons could be highlighted for this⁴, all of which are to do with demands from specific interest groups. First, there was the demand of parents, whose children had successfully completed primary education under UPE, and who started to demand low-cost access to

¹ MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, "A Comprehensive Report on Universal Post Primary Education & Training (UPPET/USE) & Universal Post O-Level Education & Training (UPOLET) National Headcount Exercise 2013", Kampala, Education Planning and Policy Analysis Department, 2013.

² NISHIMURA, M., YAMANO, T., SASAOKA, Y., "Impacts of the universal primary education policy on educational attainment and private costs in rural Uganda", *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 28, 2008, pp. 161-175.

³ CHAPMAN, D. W., BURTON, L., WERNER, J., "Universal secondary education in Uganda: the head teachers' dilemma", *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2010, pp. 77-82. DEJAEGHERE, J.G., WILLIAMS, R., KYEYUNE, R., "Ugandan secondary school head teachers' efficacy: What kind of training for whom?", *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 29, 2009, pp. 312-320.

⁴ CHAPMAN, D. W., BURTON, L., WERNER, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 77-82.

secondary education. Second, businesses were looking for a workforce that was more highly educated. Third, the political victory of the incumbent President Museveni in the 1996 electoral campaign was mainly attributed to his promise of free primary education.⁵ Thus, during the 2006 national elections, the President reminded the voters of the success of UPE and promised a continuation of 'free' education in secondary schools. All of these factors, and interest groups, led to the introduction of the USE policy, which was rolled out throughout the country.

What has been the impact of these free education policies in the country? Studies on the impact of the Universal Primary Education policy⁶ have highlighted how educational attainment⁷ increased whereas the quality of education declined⁸. Concretely, it has been shown how UPE had generally had a positive impact on enrolment rates: they increased from 53.1% in 1990 to 94.2% in 1998.⁹ It is important to note that, while previous research¹⁰ shows a positive impact on completion rates, these rates remain low: Data based on the Ugandan bureau of statistics and Uganda Ministry of Education show that in 2003, only about 22% of the students who entered the schooling system at the start of the UPE had reached P7 in 2003. Further data showed a slight improvement, but not much: in 2009, the probability of reaching P7 was about 34%.¹¹ However, World Bank data show a different picture: these data show how in 2009, 2011 and 2013 the completion rates were 57, 53 and 54%

⁵ STASAVAGE, D., "The role of democracy in Uganda's move to universal primary education", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2005, pp. 53-73.

⁶ DEININGER, K., "Does cost of schooling affect enrolment by the poor? Universal primary education in Uganda", *Economics of Education Review*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2003, pp. 291-305. LINCOVE, J.A., "The influence of price on school enrolment under Uganda's policy of free primary education", *Economics of Education Review*, Vol. 31, No. 5, 2012, pp. 799-811. MCGEE, R., "Meeting the international poverty targets in Uganda: halving poverty and achieving universal primary education", *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 18, 2000, pp. 85-106. PRINSEN, G., TITECA, K., "Uganda's decentralised primary education: musical chairs and inverted elite capture in school management committees", *Public Administration and Development*, Vol. 28, 2008, pp. 149-164. STASAVAGE, D., *op. cit.*, pp. 53-73. ZUZEA, T. L., LEIBBRANDT, M., "Free education and social inequality in Ugandan primary schools: a step backward or a step in the right direction?", *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2011, pp. 169-178.

⁷ Educational attainment includes school enrolment, completion rates, dropouts and attendance. It gives an idea of how many students are starting, going through and finishing their education. Educational performance refers to the achievement levels of the students and shows how they are performing in the different subjects. NISHIMURA, M., YAMANO, T., SASAOKA, Y., *op. cit.*, p. 162

⁸ DEININGER, K., *op. cit.*, pp. 291-305. LINCOVE, J. A., *op. cit.*, pp. 799-811. NISHIMURA, M., YAMANO, T., SASAOKA, Y., *op. cit.*, pp. 161-175.

⁹ MCGEE, R., *op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁰ NISHIMURA, M., YAMANO, T., SASAOKA, Y., *op. cit.*

¹¹ TAMUSUZA, A., "Leaving school early: the quest for Universal Primary Education in Uganda", *Journal Statistique Africain*, No. 13, 2013, pp. 110-151.

respectively.¹² In any case, both of the previous datasets are below the 2008 Sub-Saharan average of 67%, and the percentages of Tanzania and Kenya, which are at 83% and 72% respectively.¹³

The current literature on USE does not provide insights into these dynamics: it mainly focuses on the impact of USE on secondary school enrolments¹⁴, the impact of USE on teachers and moonlighting activities¹⁵ and the importance of involving headteachers in policies such as USE¹⁶. Both studies on moonlighting indicate that USE has increased the number of teaching and non-teaching jobs secondary school teachers take on to ensure personal financial stability, and thus contributed to problems of poor service-delivery¹⁷ such as higher teacher absenteeism¹⁸. Although these studies on USE provide important insights on specific dynamics, limited analysis has been done on the actual impact of USE on educational attainment and performance in secondary schools, which is a gap this article wants to address. In other words, how has USE impacted on educational attainment and performance, and what are the factors explaining this?

In order to answer the above questions, this study collected primary qualitative data through field research in Uganda, as well as secondary quantitative data, which mainly came from national databases and reports managed by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). The most important reports for this study are the MoES Education and Sports Sector Fact Sheet 2000-2013, the National USE/ Universal Post Primary Education & Training (UPPET) and UPOLET (Universal Post O-Level Education & Training) Headcount 2013 and the Education Abstract.¹⁹ Qualitative data were collected during field re-

¹² World Bank education statistics: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=education-statistics--all-indicators>, retrieved on 05 July 2015.

¹³ TAMUSUZA, A., *op. cit.*

¹⁴ ASANKHA, P., TAKASHI, Y., "Impacts of Universal Secondary Education policy on secondary school enrolments in Uganda", *Journal of Accounting, Finance and Economics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2011, pp. 16-30.

¹⁵ "Moonlighting activities" refers to the fact that teachers get involved in several teaching and non-teaching jobs to ensure personal financial stability. MOLYNEAUX, K. J., "Uganda's Universal Secondary Education Policy and its Effect on 'Empowered' Women: how reduced income and moonlighting activities differentially impact male and female teachers", *Research in Comparative and International Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2011, pp. 62-78. URWICK, J., KISA, S., "Science teacher shortage and the moonlighting culture: The pathology of the teacher labour market in Uganda", *International Journal of Educational Development*, 2013.

¹⁶ CHAPMAN, D. W., BURTON, L., WERNER, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 77-82.

¹⁷ URWICK, J., KISA, S., *op. cit.*

¹⁸ MOLYNEAUX, K. J., *op. cit.*, pp. 62-78.

¹⁹ The main limitations of these nationally collected data are the poor record keeping by education institutions at various levels, their low response rate and the lack of commitment from some district education officers and Head Teachers. MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, "Education Abstract 2013", Kampala, Education Planning and Policy Analysis Department, 2013.

search from August to October 2014 in Masaka and Kampala by the first author. During this research period, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a variety of actors, both at the local and national level, such as students, teachers, (Deputy) Head Teachers, Directors of Studies, a school founder at school level (in both USE and non-USE schools), civil servants (from the local and national government), donor representatives, teacher union representatives and NGO actors. In addition to interviews, observation and document analysis were used to collect data.

2. UGANDA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE USE POLICY

The mission statement of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in Uganda is “to provide for, support, guide and co-ordinate, regulate, and promote quality education and sports to all persons in Uganda for national integration, individual and national development”²⁰. In order to do so, the MoES not only depends on its own departments but has also partnered up with the private sector, under the Public Private Partnership or PPP system.²¹ Accordingly, secondary education is provided by both private and public schools.

More specifically, the Education Act of 2008²² categorizes education institutions as government, government-aided or private. The responsibilities of the Government of Uganda towards government and government-aided schools include: “ensuring that trained teachers are deployed; paying salaries and allowances to teachers; [...]; providing educational materials and other capital development inputs; providing national selection and admission guidelines for all pupils or students to be enrolled”²³, whereas in private institutions, the Government mainly ensures that “private education institutions conform to the rules and regulations governing the provision of education services in Uganda”²⁴. Since the Education Act does not clearly distinguish government from government-aided schools, the term ‘government schools’ will from now on be used to indicate both types of schools.

While primary education has been decentralized²⁵, the national government remains largely responsible for secondary education, by deploying teachers and head teachers²⁶, placing students and organising national examinations.²⁷

Originally one had to pass the end of the year exams to be promoted to the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² “The Education (pre-primary, primary and post-primary) Act, 2008”, Acts Supplement No. 8, *The Uganda Gazette*, vol. CI, No. 44, 29th August, 2008, p. 13.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁵ PRINSEN, G., TITECA, K., *op. cit.*, pp. 149-164.

²⁶ The principals or head masters of secondary schools are called “head teachers” in Uganda.

²⁷ DEJAEGHERE, J. G., WILLIAMS, R., KYEYUNE, R., *op. cit.*, pp. 312–320.

next class.²⁸ However, in primary schools, the government installed a policy of automatic promotion, whereby students can proceed to the next class regardless of their performance.²⁹ Our own findings³⁰ suggest that this policy has also been adopted by USE schools, in which the students automatically proceed to the following year. To proceed to the next level, that is from primary to secondary, from O-level to A-level and graduating from A-level³¹, one needs to pass the national exams administered by the Uganda National Examination Board or UNEB.³²

The Universal Secondary Education program was designed with the co-responsibility of parents, schools and government in mind to provide the necessary support, materials and facilities to effectively educate the children in secondary schools. This way parents remained responsible for providing accommodation, lunch, uniforms, medical care and scholastic materials³³, whereas the government became in charge of paying the school fees.

More specifically, the main role of the government under USE has been to subsidize costs in secondary schools by “paying school fees, providing textbooks and other instructional materials for both students and teachers, meeting the costs of co-curricular activities, school administration and maintenance”.³⁴ It is important to note here that the USE program, in contrast to UPE, is not universal – the program only applies to the O-level, that is senior one to senior four, and not to A-level.³⁵ Moreover, USE was not implemented in all schools but only those schools, both government and private, which had tuition fees under a certain threshold³⁶ so it would be financially viable for the government to fund³⁷. These are, of course, first nuances to the ‘universal’ character of the

²⁸ KASIRYE, I., *op. cit.*

²⁹ TEACHERS INITIATIVE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA [TISSA], “Teacher issues in Uganda: A diagnosis for a shared vision on issues and the designing of a feasible, indigenous and effective teachers’ policy”, UNESCO and Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013.

³⁰ For example, one of the employees at a Ugandan NGO explains in an interview on 29 September 2014 that automatic promotion depends on the foundation of the school. Schools founded by the Church rely less on government policies, these schools will not have automatic promotion. In city schools, there is automatic promotion.

³¹ Secondary education is in itself divided into two levels: ordinary level or O-level, comprising of senior one to four (S1-S4) and advanced level or A-level consisting of senior five and six (S5-S6). MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, *op. cit.* In other words, a grade in secondary schools in Uganda is indicated by S (for “senior”) followed by the year.

³² KASIRYE, I., *op. cit.*

³³ ASANKHA, P., TAKASHI, Y., *op. cit.*, pp. 16-30. CHAPMAN, D. W., BURTON, L., WERNER, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 77-82.

³⁴ MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “A Comprehensive Report...”, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ According to a deputy town clerk (interview, Masaka, 28 August 2014), the threshold at the time USE was implemented was < 70,000 UShs; [to get a better indication of the amount:] many private schools charge around 800,000 UShs.

³⁷ DEJAEGHERE, J. G., WILLIAMS, R., KYEYUNE, R., *op. cit.*, pp. 312–320.

USE policy, which Chapman *et al.*³⁸ describe as: “Neither universal nor free”. The next sections will further nuance the universal character of this policy.

3. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND PERFORMANCE

3.1. Enrolment in USE schools

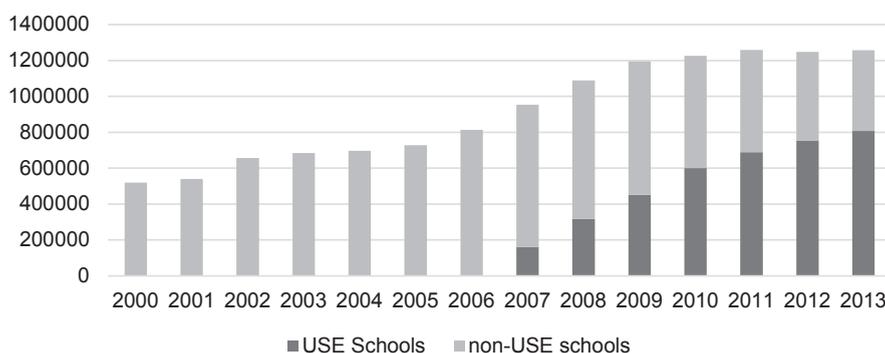
What has been the effect of USE on enrolment³⁹? Did the subsidizing of school costs really increase the enrolment numbers? The statistics do in fact suggest so. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, total enrolment in secondary schools rapidly increased in the years following the implementation. More specifically, enrolment in USE schools has continuously increased since its implementation, whereas enrolment in non-USE schools has been declining since 2006. When only considering USE enrolment into senior one (S1), the number continuously increased from 161,396 in 2007 to 251,040 in 2013.⁴⁰ The massive increase in enrolment was confirmed by the (deputy) headteachers in the majority of the USE schools visited. As one headteacher argued: “The school received an increase in student enrolment. Without the program, many would’ve stayed at home. In the past, there were many cases of dropout from inability to pay fees. [...] The overall enrolment now is 450, before it was 100.”⁴¹

³⁸ CHAPMAN, D. W., BURTON, L., WERNER, J., *op. cit.*, p. 78.

³⁹ According to the Ugandan Ministry of Education, enrolment refers to “those pupils who were admitted/re-admitted and fully recorded in the school’s register at the beginning of the first term. It includes all those pupils whose names appear on the school register (including repeaters and those temporarily absent).” MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “Education Abstract 2013”, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁴⁰ 2009 and 2012 are an exception to this: In 2009 the decline in S1 intake was due to more students failing the Primary Leaving Exam in 2008 compared to 2007, which resulted in a lower number of students qualifying to enter secondary education. The decrease in 2012 was attributed to the stabilization of the program as a result of increased supervision to combat irregular reporting and admission practices. MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “A Comprehensive Report ...”, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ Interview, Deputy Head Teacher, Kampala, 1 October 2014. Similar statements were made by other head teachers, for example: “Enrolment is 3,105, an increase of around 100 students since last year. There has been a continuous increase over the last years.” Interview, Deputy Head Teacher, Kampala, 10 October 2014.

Figure 1: Total enrolment in secondary schools, 2000-2013

Source: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “Education and Sports Sector Fact Sheet 2000-2013.”, Kampala, 2013.

There are, however, a number of caveats: First, this shift in enrolment is partially due to the fact that some non-USE schools have joined the program and that a number of new USE schools have been built.⁴² Second, an important caveat is that enrolment data, as communicated by USE schools, may actually not reflect the actual number of students. Since USE grants are released per child, some schools report ghost students to increase their funds.⁴³ Moreover, the enrolment figures reported to the Ministry may also lack accuracy as a result of poor record keeping in the majority of secondary schools and a lack of involvement of education officers at local government levels in national headcount exercises.⁴⁴

Moreover, total enrolment only indicates how many people registered in total, but does not portray whether or not percentage-wise more children are going to secondary schools. In other words it does not depict the change in actual access to secondary education. For example, as the Ugandan population aged 0-14 also continued to rise over the years, the rise in secondary education enrolment might therefore simply be explained due to the rise of children of school-going age. Accordingly, it is more valuable to look at the net enrolment rate (NER), which indicates the percentage of Ugandan children of school-going age accessing secondary education, and which is calculated as the ratio of children of the official secondary school age enrolled in secondary education to all children (enrolled and not enrolled) of that same age category.⁴⁵ As

⁴² Data from the Ministry of Education and Sports indicate that since the inception of the program the number of USE schools has increased by 664, from 1155 in 2007 to 1819 in 2013. MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “Education and Sports Sector Fact Sheet 2000-2013”, Kampala, 2013.

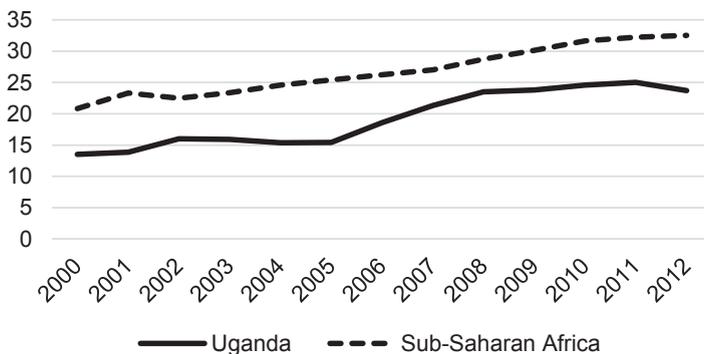
⁴³ MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “A Comprehensive Report ...”, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “Education Abstract 2013”, *op. cit.*

a result the NER gives an indication of how many children of a certain age category are not enrolled. As depicted in Figure 2, Uganda is still performing below the sub-Saharan Africa average with little indication of sustainable and sufficient improvements in net enrolments, despite efforts to increase access to secondary education through USE. Concretely, after a rapid increase of the NER between 2005 and 2008 in Uganda, it stabilized and even slightly decreased in 2012, whereas in sub-Saharan Africa, the NER has continued to grow slowly but steadily from 2002 onwards. Thus, it seems that – contrary to what one would expect – abolishing school fees under USE has *not* contributed to sustained growth rates in net enrolment in Uganda nor to an increase in access to secondary education above the sub-Saharan Africa average. This comes as a surprise since, as explained in the introduction, Uganda is often portrayed as a pioneer in implementing new educational reforms to expand access in education, such as the universal primary education and now also the universal secondary education.

Figure 2: Net Enrolment Rate (NER), in %, 2000-2012



WORLD BANK, “World Development Indicators 2014”,
<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>, retrieved on 2 November 2014

3.2. Attendance in USE schools

Our field research within USE schools revealed two principal trends: On the one hand, the attendance of students has become more regular, as they are not sent back anymore due to the inability to pay fees. As a deputy head teacher summarized: “The impact on attendance is positive: now parents can afford to send their children to school. In fact attendance has become more regular. [...] Interested learners have regular attendance, while in the past intelligent, gifted learners would sometimes not be able to attend school because of lack of money”⁴⁶. On the other hand, taking away parents’ responsibility to pay fees

⁴⁶ Interview, Deputy Head Teacher, Masaka, 10 September 2014.

seems to have decreased parents' involvement in their children's education and this, in turn, negatively impacted student attendance in USE schools. A number of school level actors expressed the feeling that a number of students were now absent because the parents' engagement had reduced. As a director of studies in a Kampala school argued: "Because students are not paying, the parents do not feel it when they do not attend school. Per stream you can find 10 students absent. Some have small businesses at home. For others parents don't care since they are not paying."⁴⁷ A deputy head teacher argued how "USE increased stability. There are few cases of absenteeism. Now the reason for students being absent is the negligence of parents. Students have not yet attached value to education as a result of the nature of the community, mainly because they have created the habit of going fishing."⁴⁸ In other words, and as will be explained in more detail below, parents have become less engaged in their children's education and involvement in school, through which children have become engaged in other activities.

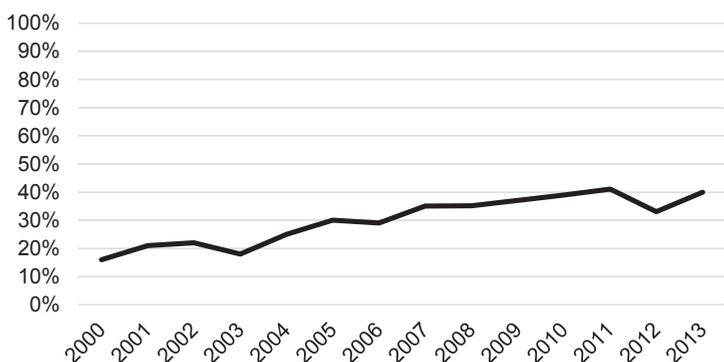
3.3. Retaining students in USE schools

Another indicator for looking at the success of the USE program is the completion rate, which the Ugandan Ministry of Education defines as the "total number of pupils/students who registered for end of cycle exams (primary, secondary or tertiary) regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population at the official primary/secondary graduation age".⁴⁹ As depicted in figure 3, the completion rate for all secondary schools, USE as well as non-USE, grew from 16% in 2000 to 40% in 2013. As this growth was continuous in the period before as well as after the implementation of USE, there is therefore no clear indication that the USE policy influenced the completion rate in secondary schools.

⁴⁷ Interview, Director of Studies, Kampala, 15 October 2014.

⁴⁸ Interview, Deputy Head Teacher, Kampala, 1 October 2014.

⁴⁹ MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, "Education Abstract 2013", *op. cit.*, p. 82.

Figure 3: Completion Rate Senior 4, 2000-2013

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, "Education and Sports Sector Fact Sheet 2000-2013.", Kampala, 2013.

Our qualitative research brought out a mixed picture in this context. On the one hand, our findings indicate that USE has positively influenced access and dropout rates, and more particularly by abolishing school fees. As a head girl summarized: "USE helps those who cannot have the ability to pay school fees. It helps the parents see a future for their children. I suggest that it stands there forever, for the younger ones to also get the chance to get secondary education."⁵⁰ A headteacher added to this: "Since USE, there is a decreased dropout because it is free education. Before, the paying of school fees was the main reason [for dropouts]. There was also less monitoring. Reasons now are early pregnancies and activities like boda-boda, sand mining, forest activity [...] In A-level there is no government support so the children run away and go finishing because they cannot pay school fees. Problem for dropout from S2 to S3 is early pregnancies. [...]"⁵¹ On the other hand, these quotes also highlight how dropouts are now particularly caused by non-financial constraints, such as early pregnancies and the availability of profitable alternative activities, as well as other financial constraints: government funding does not cover fees for accommodation, lunch, uniforms, medical care and scholastic materials⁵².

⁵⁰ Interview, head girl, Kampala, 1 October 2014.

⁵¹ Interview, head teacher, Kampala, 1 October 2014.

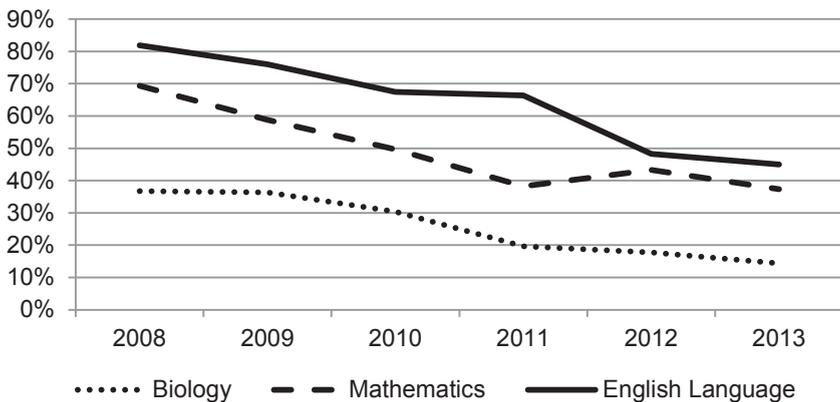
⁵² ASANKHA, P., TAKASHI, Y., *op. cit.*, pp. 16-30. CHAPMAN, D. W., BURTON, L., WERNER, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 77-82. As another deputy head teacher argues: "[The main] reasons [for dropouts] are some students are not able to meet the requirements [such as] school uniform, [...], scholastic materials, sanitary pads for girls. Government does not pay for the requirements." (Interview, Deputy Head Teacher, Masaka, 10 September 2014). These findings are reflected in a study on dropouts by the Ministry of Education, which equally highlights the financial and non-financial constraints poor communities continue to face, and which remain unaddressed under the USE policy. More specifically, the study highlights early pregnancies (in 59% of the schools), followed by parents transferring to other new areas (in 31% of the schools) and lack of interest in education by parents (29%). MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS,

It is also worth highlighting the high opportunity costs of sending children of poor households to school: particularly older children from poorer households who attend school miss out on the opportunity to work and maintain themselves and their family.⁵³

3.4. Educational performance

What has been the impact of USE on educational performance? A good indicator is the National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE), which annually assesses the achievement levels of students in senior two (S2) in Biology, Mathematics and English Language. This exercise is done to supplement the information on performance obtained from the national examinations and is used to identify critical areas in need of attention in order to enhance educational quality.⁵⁴ As shown in figure 4, performance in the three subjects being tested in the NAPE has dramatically declined since 2008.

Figure 4: Percentage of S2 students rated proficient, 2008-2013



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “Education and Sports Sector Fact Sheet 2000-2013.”, Kampala, 2013.

It is important to note that, as depicted in figure 5, the performance in USE schools is substantially lower than in non-USE schools for the subjects

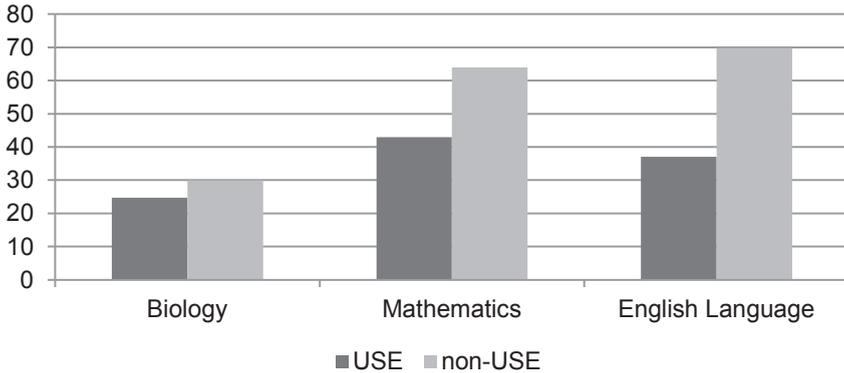
“Dropout Study in Universal Secondary Education (USE)”, Education Planning and Policy Analysis Department (Statistics Section), 2012.

⁵³ A student summarizes this as “Some [students] get pregnant. Because of the influence of money, many want to work. Some don’t have money. Some don’t want to go [to school because], they want to fish.” (Interview, head boy, Kampala, 1 October 2014).

⁵⁴ UGANDA NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS BOARD, “The Achievement of S2 Students in Mathematics, English Language and Biology”, *National Assessment of Progress in Education report 2013*, Kampala, 2013.

tested. All of this adds to a rather negative picture: In sum, we have shown how the abolishment of school fees did not lead to the expected growth in attainment and its impact on educational performance was particularly bad: performance declined, particularly in USE schools. In the next section, we will look in more detail at the factors which might explain this.

Figure 5: Percentage of S2 students rated proficient in USE and non-USE schools, 2013



UGANDA NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS BOARD, “The Achievement of S2 Students in Mathematics, English Language and Biology”. National Assessment of Progress in Education report 2013, Kampala, 2013.

4. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PERFORMANCE OF USE

In looking at the factors which might influence the performance of USE, we respectively focus on the budgetary reductions, congested classrooms and low teacher morale, and the political role of free education policies.

4.1. Budgetary reductions

As mentioned before, under USE, the Government of Uganda is paying tuition fees for a prescribed number of both public and private schools. Moreover, under the Education Act of 2008⁵⁵ the Government is responsible for providing learning and instructional materials, structural development, and recruiting and deploying teacher and non-teaching staff in government schools.

Generally, the key-actors question the government’s budgetary commitment to its education policy. As a representative from the teachers union argued: “Government public expenditure has not been focusing on recruiting teachers,

⁵⁵ The Education (pre-primary, primary and post-primary) Act of 2008, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

because education is not given the priority it should receive and because of political capital. It is easier to pay for the votes, put money where they can get votes, for example in campaigning for elections.”⁵⁶ A deputy head teacher summarized this in the following way: “The [USE] project is underfunded, funding is inadequate [...] staffing is inadequate, infrastructure is inadequate, there are too many USE schools so there is not enough budget per school.”⁵⁷ These statements are also reflected in Uganda’s budget: although the total education expenditure slightly increased⁵⁸, there has been a decrease in the percentage of GDP allocated to education from 4.2% in 2003/4 to 3.3% in 2010/11⁵⁹. In comparison with the average of 3.9% for other low income countries⁶⁰, a percentage of 3.3% is below average.⁶¹ In other words, the government’s expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP is declining and even dropping below the low income countries’ average.

In these circumstances, stakeholders at both government and school level are struggling to keep up with the increased workload that came with USE and often fail to provide quality service delivery in secondary education. As two civil servants at the Ministry of Education explain:

“With increased enrolment came many complications: need for more classes, more teachers, more instructional materials and need for more people in the department. This in combination with increased workload, pressure for teachers, science equipment, facilities in schools and pressure on the budget itself. (...). Government has not employed the required number of civil servants at the department. The national budget is not enough, civil servants are overstretched as you can see [pointing to the long line of people waiting in the hallway].”⁶²

“There are not enough inspectors, so the school-inspector ratio is quite high. This has led to inadequate support supervision to teachers, inadequate coverage; [as a result] some schools are only visited once a year. There is limited support to schools that require a lot of attention. The workload has increased (...). If you have to do more, you expect to be paid more, but this is not yet there, because of the cash limit of the government. Also infrastructure and facilities are a big challenge. (...) Schools require more teachers but because of inadequate funds this is not done. So if you have no money, what to do?”⁶³

⁵⁶ Interview, Uganda National Teachers’ Union (UNATU) representative, Kampala, 17 October 2014.

⁵⁷ Interview, deputy head teacher secondary school, 10 September 2014.

⁵⁸ From about 968 billion US\$ in 2003/4 to 1,283 billion US\$ in 2010/11, according to TEACHERS INITIATIVE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Countries with a GDP per capita below USD 800 (*Ibid.*).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Interview, Secondary Education Department Officer, Kampala, 23 October 2014.

⁶³ Interview, Directorate of Education Standards Commissioner, Kampala, 23 October 2014.

In other words, the education sector is not provided with the budget or staffing necessary to accommodate the large increase in enrolment in USE schools.⁶⁴ As a result, civil servants, similarly to USE teachers, are overstretched without being adequately compensated or supported. For USE schools this means there are not enough funds for adequate staffing, infrastructure and instructional materials.

4.2. Congested classrooms and low teacher morale

A major problem with the USE policy are large and congested classes; something which was repeated several times throughout the interviews. As a deputy head teacher summarized:

“In this school performance has worsened. The reasons for this are the numbers: it is not easy for teachers to capture the attention of more than 80 students per class. The average teacher-student ratio is 1:85. One year ago the reason was also lack of space. This is better now. It is common in USE schools to conduct lessons in open space but it is a challenge to keep the attention of the students and it undermines their performance. The admissions should be limited, we cannot keep admitting everyone.”⁶⁵

Large classes are often seen as negatively impacting teaching and learning.⁶⁶ It is not only harder to control classes⁶⁷, but it is particularly difficult to follow up on students who are academically weaker: as mentioned before, because of the nature of the USE policy, teachers are faced with students who are academically weaker and have more challenges to overcome than children

⁶⁴ As highlighted above, this is an absolute increase in enrolment, rather than a relative increase: the net enrolment rates have started to decline in recent years, and are below average in sub-Saharan Africa. As the net enrolments were not accompanied by sufficient budgetary and infrastructure investments, this led to large frustrations among the relevant staff.

⁶⁵ Interview, Deputy Head Teacher, Masaka, 10 September 2014. This is repeated by many other actors: “There are around 110 students in my classes in O-level. I am used to it, other places have up to 180 students per class.” (interview, science teacher, Kampala, 10 October 2014). “In senior one there are around 138 students per class, in senior two 119, in senior three 96 and in senior four 115.” (interview, Head Teacher, Kampala, 1 October 2014). “Last term [there were] 67 [students in my class] in S2 and 80 in S1” (interview, French teacher, Kampala, 30 September 2014).

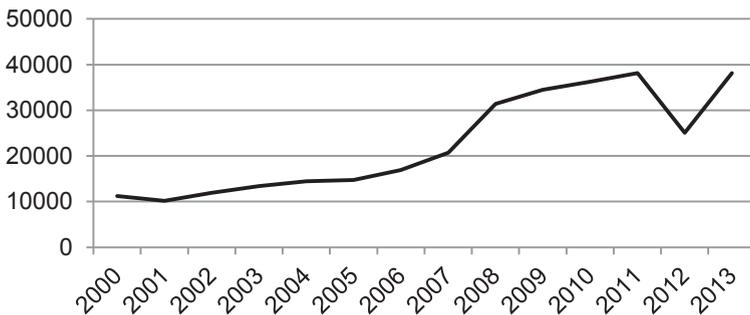
⁶⁶ O’SULLIVAN, M. C., “Teaching large classes: the international evidence and a discussion of some good practice in Ugandan primary schools.”, *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2006, pp. 24-37. SEKIWU, D., “Strategies of coping with effective teaching and learning in large classes in Secondary Schools in Kampala District”, Unpublished paper, 2009.

⁶⁷ For example, as a young teacher at a school in Kampala explains: “One of the main challenges is lack of control over students; sometimes there are too many. The student-teacher ratio is high.” (Interview, young teacher, Kampala, 10 October 2014).

enrolling in non-USE schools. Moreover, as mentioned previously, automatic promotion has decreased pressure on children to attend class since students get promoted to the next level regardless of their attendance or performance in class.

These tendencies are also reflected in the quantitative data. On the one hand, as shown in figure 6, the total number of classrooms in all secondary schools increased substantially with the implementation of USE, from 16,948 in 2006 to 31,368 in 2008; an increase of 85% in 2 years.⁶⁸

Figure 6: Total number of classrooms in secondary schools, 2000-2013



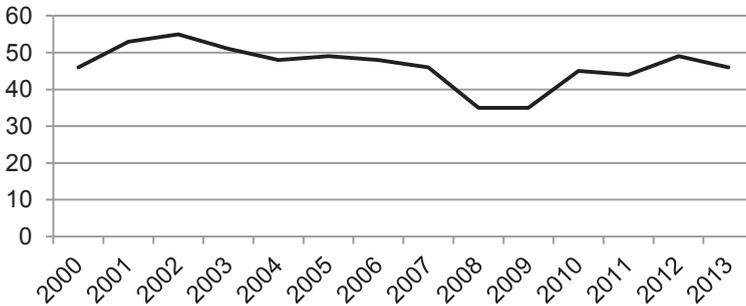
Source: MoES, Education and Sports Factsheet 2000-2013, EMIS data
 MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “Education and Sports Sector Fact Sheet 2000-2013.”, Kampala, 2013.

Accordingly, the student-classroom ratio (SCR), calculated by dividing enrolment in all secondary schools by the number of secondary school classrooms⁶⁹, rapidly decreased from 48 in 2006 to 35 in 2008 – as shown in figure 7 below.

⁶⁸ The decline in 2012 seems to indicate an irregularity in the data collection.

⁶⁹ MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “Education Abstract 2013”, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

Figure 7: Student-classroom ratio for all secondary schools, 2000-2013



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “Education and Sports Sector Fact Sheet 2000-2013.”, Kampala, 2013.

On the other hand, this positive evolution did not last: after 2009, the student-classroom ratio increased again, reaching 46 in 2013. Moreover, there was a difference between USE and non-USE schools, in which USE schools were worse off: the National Headcount Exercise of 2013 reveals that for USE schools the national average is 62 students per class.⁷⁰ The exercise also reports high congestion in USE schools, with around 34% of the schools accommodating more students than the policy’s 60-students-per-class target. Government data show that more than one in ten students enrolled in the USE schools that participated in the headcount attended school in classes of more than 120 students.⁷¹

Secondly, as was shown above in figure 1, the total secondary school enrolment rapidly increased in the period 2007-2009 and continued with a more stabilized growth from 2010-2013. Over the entire USE period, student enrolment increased by 32%.⁷² Yet, the same MoES data indicate that teacher deployment rose at a significantly slower rate, by 20%. Figure 8 depicts the total number of teachers deployed in secondary education over the period 2000-2013. As is shown by the graph, there was a large recruitment of teachers in the years following the implementation of USE. However, since 2009 the number of teachers has slightly declined while enrolment in secondary schools has continued to increase⁷³. In this situation, the additional recruitment of teachers was not sufficient to meet the increased influx of students, because of which schools were left with inadequate staffing, something which was conti-

⁷⁰ MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “A Comprehensive Report ...”, *op. cit.*

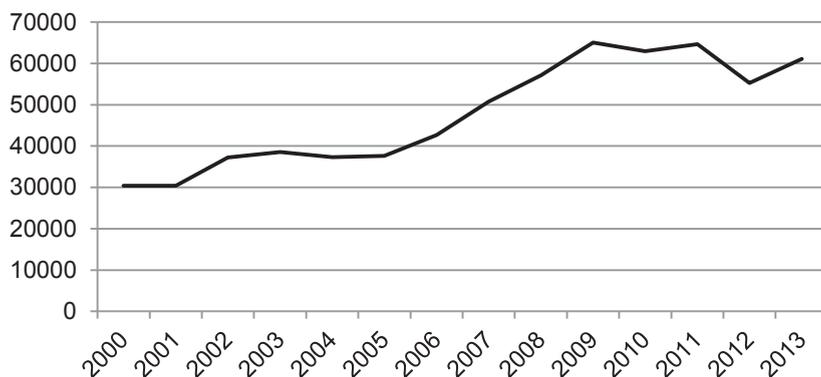
⁷¹ *Ibid.* MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “Education Abstract 2013”, *op. cit.*

⁷² MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “Education Abstract 2013”, *op. cit.*

⁷³ As shown above, this growth happened first rapidly, and then became a more stabilized growth.

nously emphasized by many school-level actors. As one headteacher, for example, summarizes: “The number of teachers has gone up but so has the number of students. [...]. However, in USE schools teacher staffing remains inadequate [...]”⁷⁴

Figure 8: Total number of teachers in secondary schools, 2000-2013



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “Education and Sports Sector Fact Sheet 2000-2013.”, Kampala, 2013.

In response to these challenges, some of the over-subscribed schools are applying a double shift system, where students are taught in two shifts, morning and afternoon.⁷⁵ Naturally, this increases the work pressure on the teachers. As the headteacher of a school in Kampala explains: “Teachers have got to work the whole day, they must work from eight in the morning until six in the evening.”⁷⁶

Moreover, although the workload for teachers has increased strongly since the introduction of USE, their salary has paradoxically been reduced, since they are no longer able to receive salary top-ups by the parents. This lack of additional financial benefits for USE teachers has led to motivation problems:

“The difference between USE and non-USE teachers is motivation. In USE, there is no additional contribution by the parents. And as a result, they are not paid additional services such as accommodation, lunch, transport allowance.”⁷⁷

“Teachers are not motivated. When students were paying, teachers received some extra money for transport and housing allowances.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Interview, Deputy Head Teacher, Masaka, 10 September 2014.

⁷⁵ MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS, “A Comprehensive Report ...”, *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ Interview, 15 October 2014.

⁷⁷ Interview, UNATU representative, Kampala, 17 October 2014.

⁷⁸ Interview, Director of Studies, Kampala, 15 October 2014.

“In government schools teachers are paid by government. [...] a PTA⁷⁹ meeting was organised to ask parents to increase their contribution for teachers’ salaries, but government policy actually doesn’t allow it. The government doesn’t like it because they don’t want anyone to pay for education. However, as long as parents agree, it is okay. If the parents do not agree, the school is not allowed to ask for these fees.”⁸⁰

“The reasons why teachers do not show up for work are motivation, their salary not being enough; so they work part time in other places, (...)some don’t have money to commute far, (...) some people don’t want to work”.⁸¹

As mentioned in the quotes above, USE teachers receive less financial support than their colleagues in non-USE schools, where parents’ contributions cater for teachers’ transport allowances and the topping up of their government salaries. USE schools, however, are discouraged from asking for parental contributions and, consequently, lose the ability to provide additional benefits to their teachers. As the above quotes illustrate, USE teachers confirm that the lack of transport allowance and teacher accommodation, together with the meagre pay, has led to low teacher morale.

As a result of teacher absence, students are often left without class, leading to gaps in the curricula and affecting student performance⁸². For example, during our field research, students were often found not attending class, as teachers were not present.⁸³

Thirdly, another problem USE schools are facing is the inadequate timing of government funds. As a trade union actor pointed out: “There is an inconsistency in the release of funds, amount and timing. There is an expectation that it comes on time: policy states it should come one week before term starts.”⁸⁴ However, funds are not distributed on time, which was consistently mentioned by actors at the school level:

“Government pays little and late, sometimes I need to go around and borrow money”⁸⁵

“a major challenge is late remittances as a result of which we have to engage, contract a supplier, enter in agreement that if government grants are late these suppliers supply instructional materials before payment is done. A big

⁷⁹ PTA stands for Parent-Teacher Association and is one of the governing bodies of secondary schools.

⁸⁰ Interview, Head Teacher, Masaka, 8 September 2014.

⁸¹ Interview, Head Teacher Private USE School, Masaka, 8 September 2014.

⁸² MOLYNEAUX, K. J., *op. cit.*, pp. 62-78. URWICK, J., KISA, S., *op. cit.*

⁸³ For example, when the first author was visiting a school, at a time when classes were supposed to be taking place, several students were lying in the grass under a tree. When approaching two girl students, they explained: “Now we’re supposed to have maths but the teacher is not around.” Interview, 30 September 2014.

⁸⁴ Interview, 17 October 2014.

⁸⁵ Interview, Head Teacher, Kampala, 30 September 2014.

disadvantage of this is that items become more expensive.”⁸⁶

The lack of adequately timed funding puts the school management under great pressure, which, due to the struggle to cover day-to-day operations, often fails to address basic quality issues. The main difference with government non-USE schools is that the latter can increase school fees or gather one-off additional funds from parents as a buffer, whereas USE schools are dependent on the government to improve infrastructure and provide physical resources.⁸⁷ For USE schools, the Education Act of 2008⁸⁸ only allows school management to collect voluntary parent and third party contributions to deal with emergency situations and imposes sanctions as high as twelve months imprisonment for sending students away from school or denying them access to education for failure to pay these contributions. As a result, school management in USE schools can no longer easily collect contributions from parents. In other words, funding for USE schools does not arrive on time and is inadequate, which of course is problematic as USE is primarily implemented in schools and communities where resources were already scarce: USE was implemented in under-resourced schools which under the policy mainly remained underfunded. DeJaeghere *et al.* describe the paradox of the USE policy in the following way:

“USE schools are now having an increase in students with minimal funding from the government, while [...] better resourced schools do not have an influx of students, or any additional students entering these schools have to pay higher fees.”⁸⁹

4.3. The political role of free education policies

Lastly, it is important to mention how USE has played an important political role: one of the motives behind the implementation of USE in 2007 was President Museveni’s 2006 strategic election promise of ‘free’ education, making Uganda the first sub-Saharan African country to embark on a universal secondary education journey.⁹⁰ Also on the international level, USE has a number of advantages: it helps to build a good image for the country in the international donor community, particularly by helping the country to reach the Millennium Development Goals or MDGs.⁹¹ In the implementation of USE, the government was able to obtain loans from the World Bank and various

⁸⁶ Interview, Head Teacher, Kampala, 15 October 2014.

⁸⁷ Interview, Education Officer, Masaka Municipality, 14 August 2014.

⁸⁸ The Education (pre-primary, primary and post-primary) Act of 2008, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁸⁹ DEJAEGERE, J. G., WILLIAMS, R., KYEYUNE, R., *op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 312–320.

⁹¹ STASAVAGE, D., *op. cit.*, pp. 53–73.

other donors⁹².⁹³ Similarly, UPE was a strategic promise of President Museveni during the 1996 elections.⁹⁴ Stasavage demonstrates this in detail, by showing how initially (in 1995), Museveni was still reluctant to invest in free primary education, deeming it more effective to focus on increasing Ugandan citizens' incomes through road building so parents acquire more money to pay school fees themselves.⁹⁵ However, Museveni radically shifted the electoral campaign focus to universalizing primary education after his promise to abolish school fees in a radio speech was highly appreciated by the electorate.⁹⁶ It was generally argued that the "scope of the election victory was due in large part to the promise of free education"⁹⁷. Moreover, data from the 2000 Afrobarometer survey show, on the one hand, the popularity of president Museveni (93% of respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with the president) – particularly in comparison with other African countries (where this percentage was 65%), and on the other hand, it shows how this popularity was directly linked to the government's achievements in areas such as education.⁹⁸ In other words, free education policies are politically useful and beneficial. This is not only the case for the President himself – as demonstrated by Stasavage⁹⁹ – but also for other politicians: many politicians use the 'free education' discourse as a way of gaining popularity among their constituents. While this certainly creates benefits for politicians, this is less so for schools. As the following interview quotes of local school actors illustrate, free education policies are used by individual politicians to create political capital, a situation which has a negative effect on the actual functioning of the schools, and particularly the relations with the parents:

"Education is politicized, the parents have to provide lunch, uniforms and books but when politicians campaign or come to the schools they tell parents not to pay, they tell them they can just send their children to school. Politicians even say if anyone or any school asks for money, this should be reported to them."¹⁰⁰

"Education is politicized. When USE was started they would go tell parents that everything was on the government. As a result responsibility of parents was withdrawn, they sat back and expected government to do everything [...] people

⁹² For donors, being active in the education sector in Uganda is equally beneficial, as investing in education is seen as not only a basic human right but also an effective way of eradicating poverty and enhancing economic growth. ALTINYELKEN, H. K., "Curriculum change in Uganda: Teacher perspectives on the new thematic curriculum.", *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 151-161.

⁹³ ASANKHA, P., TAKASHI, Y., *op. cit.*, pp. 16-30.

⁹⁴ CHAPMAN, D. W., BURTON, L., WERNER, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 77-82.

⁹⁵ STASAVAGE, D., *op. cit.*, pp. 53-73.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-73.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Ugandan NGO actor, Kampala, 29 September 2014.

in policy making positions have been ignoring this because they do not put their children in USE schools, they send them to expensive private schools. So, they are not touched directly.”¹⁰¹

“Politicians just want to be popular, they don’t necessarily tell the truth, just want to be popular. They infuse it with popularization and own desire to be known among the people. Politicians are selfish, they only look at their vote. Especially now in the country, they see politics as a career, they struggle to get in, not as a service.”¹⁰²

In sum, politicians in Uganda portray USE as a government offer which provides completely free education to the entire population. As shown above, this is not the case; and the politicians’ statements are therefore not only misleading for the parents, but also for USE schools: the USE program was designed with the co-responsibility of government, parents and schools in mind in order to provide the support, materials and facilities necessary to effectively educate the children in secondary schools. The politicians’ statement of completely free education, which put all financial responsibility strictly with the government, have therefore led to a strong reduction of parental involvement. As some of the interviewed (deputy) head teachers explain:

“One of the main challenges of the school concerning USE is reduced parental involvement. They think everything is for free.”¹⁰³

“Parents are not sensitized. USE is seen as a government offer, [the parents] don’t care about their children’s schooling, they’re waiting for government to take action.”¹⁰⁴

In other words, many parents expect the government to provide everything for their children’s education. The way in which the USE policy is understood is crucial in this, and particularly the politician’s role in creating this impression, while the government has failed to properly sensitize the population to the actual content of USE. An NGO actor in an interview states how “the government only conducts a limited sensitization of different stakeholders, leading to parents not doing their roles”¹⁰⁵; while others hold the schools responsible: “[...] now schools have to take up their role to sensitize the parents [...]”¹⁰⁶. In their study on the effectiveness of newspaper campaigns in reducing the capture of UPE funds in Uganda, Reinikka & Svensson¹⁰⁷ demonstrate the power

¹⁰¹ Interview, UNATU representative, Kampala, 17 October 2014.

¹⁰² Interview, Ugandan employee from a donor actor, Kampala, 3 October 2014.

¹⁰³ Interview, Deputy Head Teacher, Kampala, 10 October 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Head Teacher, Kampala, 1 October 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Ugandan NGO actor, Kampala, 29 September 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Ugandan employee from a donor actor, Kampala, 3 October 2014.

¹⁰⁷ REINIKKA, R., SVENSSON J., “Fighting corruption to improve schooling: evidence from a newspaper campaign in Uganda.”, *Journal of the European Economic Association*, Vol. 3, No. 2-3, 2005, pp. 259-267.

of public information: sensitization of the general public to particular policies is crucial for the successful implementation of these policies. The use of these policies as political capital is rather harmful, particularly because parental engagement is crucial for the USE policy.

This lack of sensitization feeds into an existing situation, in which certain categories of parents only have limited interest in the education of their children: the underprivileged background of USE students means that many family heads of USE students only have limited education and, as a result, do not always fully realize the importance of secondary education.¹⁰⁸ Or as a head girl summarizes it: “Some of our parents do not know the value of education because they are not educated themselves, think the money is still too much.”¹⁰⁹

5. CONCLUSIONS

This article discussed the impact of the Universal Secondary Education policies on education attainment and performance. It showed how the impact of USE has been rather mixed. Amongst other things, its political role played an important role in this. Concretely,¹¹⁰ ‘free’ education policies such as USE have an important political purpose: USE helped President Museveni in the 2006 elections, and it helps a whole range of political actors in gaining popularity at the local level. In doing so, political rhetoric about the importance of USE has proven to be more important than the quality of services and budgetary commitments: its budgetary importance continues to decline, and budgetary instalments often come too late – while these commitments are crucial in universal education policies. Put differently, the importance which is given to education on a discursive political level is not followed up in practice. This has led to a situation in which the general circumstances in which schools need to function are far from ideal: strongly congested classrooms and delayed budgetary transmissions for example all negatively affect the way in which the schools function. Furthermore, two categories of actors are crucial in explaining the current performance: first, teachers in USE schools are in several ways worse off than before: they are faced with a much higher workload, due to the higher number of students, as well as the academically more challenging circumstances due to the lower admission criteria and automatic promotions. However, they are paid less than before the USE policy: they are no longer able to receive additional contributions from parents under the USE system. This, of course, negatively affects their morale,

¹⁰⁸ Interview, Head Teacher, Kampala, 30 September 2014. Interview, school counsellor and teacher, Kampala, 30 September 2014. Interview, head girl, Kampala, 1 October 2014. Interview, Director of Studies, Kampala, 15 October 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, head girl, Kampala, 1 October 2014.

¹¹⁰ Chapman *et al.* make the same point. CHAPMAN, D. W., BURTON, L., WERNER, J., *op. cit.*, p. 81.

and their presence in the schools – all of which negatively affects educational performance. Second, the role of parents is also crucial. Poor parents are still faced with a range of financial and non-financial constraints: they still have to pay for a range of costs, such as uniforms and lunches, and more generally, the opportunity costs of sending children to school remain high. As the USE policy mainly targets poor communities these (indirect) financial constraints continue to play a major role in the schooling decision. Moreover, parents are also less involved with the schools than they were before the introduction of USE. All of this affects the performance of the students, which a deputy head teacher summarized in the following way: “Performance has decreased since USE, students are not well motivated. They lack lunch, because of negligence from parents or guardians. The general attitude is poor; because education is free, the parents don’t see their role as stakeholders.”¹¹¹

In sum, it can be argued how USE is very much a national-level political decision which has been introduced without taking much into account the effects throughout the education system on particular categories of actors on various levels. In this way, USE suffers from the same problems as UPE: the necessary partnerships are missing, and need to be strengthened. With regard to UPE, Higgins & Rwanyange¹¹² highlighted the importance of local ownership of reforms and called for “more concerted attention to strengthening local partnerships, cooperation and creativity and facilitation of greater integration between different levels of the education system”. This, of course, is not enough: more budgetary attention is crucial to improving the performance of USE.

Ghent/Brussels, July 2015

¹¹¹ Interview, Deputy Head Teacher, Kampala, 10 October 2014.

¹¹² HIGGINS, L., RWANYANGE, R., “Ownership in the education reform process in Uganda.”, *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2005, p. 7.