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Decentralization Policy and Performance of Universal Primary Education in Uganda

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Abstract	Original Research Article

This study assessed the correlation between decentralisation policy implementation and Universal Primary Education (UPE) performance in Uganda. It was guided by the objective of assessing the relationship between political decentralisation and Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) performance in Katerera County in Rubirizi district, in Uganda. The study adopted a descriptive research design with quantitative and qualitative approaches. A sample of 139 respondents were selected using Slovene's formula. Data was collected using questionnaire and interview guide and analyzed using frequencies, percentages, Pearson's correlation and regression analysis for quantitative data and thematic analysis was used for analyzing qualitative data. The study findings established a significant relationship between political decentralisation and PLE performance of UPE schools in Katerera County and a unit increase in political decentralisation affects the PLE performance of UPE schools in Katerera County by 17%. The study concluded that decentralisation policy implementation contributes 61% to the PLE performance of UPE schools in Katerera County; Rubirizi District. From the study findings, the researcher recommended that central government should put much efforts in implementing decentralisation policy since it was found to have a significant relationship with performance of UPE schools, reduce bureaucracies for releasing money for buying scholastic materials, encourage parents to give financial support to their respective schools and increasing funding for local governments especially in the education sector.
Keywords: Decentralization, Politics, performance, UPE schools.

INTRODUCTION

Universal Primary Education was introduced to ensure by 2015, all children should have attained a full course of primary level but in Africa, this was not achieved by then (Millennium development goals, 2015). According to Rabbi (2018) right to education at primary level can empower people to save their minds from the wickedness of illiteracy and backwardness. It represents the foundation in the development line of any society and the key indicator of the people's progress and prosperity. In view of the importance of education to any country, primary education system which is spread and different due to economic, socio-cultural, political, regional and religious factors and the access of primary education is maintained mainly by the government (Ahmed, 2018).

Universal Primary Education (UPE) has become popular since 1950 and it was established in Africa for purposes of human rights, equity and social economic development (Nishimura & Orawa, 2015). Education at primary level was intended to be free and compulsory but this is not the case in Africa because parents are still paying and some children fail to attain primary education level (Nishimura & Orawa, 2015). Worldwide, UPE has been progressing and this demonstrated by the increase in enrolment up to 90%. However, Siddiqui (2007) maintains that most challenges that affect the performance of UPE across the world are financial constraints, greater distance from home to school, perception of parents on quality of education, incompetence of teachers, absenteeism, and unpleasant physical and academic environment.

Uganda's Universal Primary Education (UPE) program that was launched in 1997, has received particular attention, due to the massive increase in primary school enrollment, as well the sustained increase in public spending on education that it has entailed (Stasavage, 2005). According to Jandhyala

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(2009), several goals of Education for All (EFA), universal primary education has been the most important one.

The study was based on the Endogenous Growth Theory (EGT) developed by Romer (1986). The EGT holds that Local Government performance in policy implementation is primarily the result of support from central government and local revenue mobilisation. It holds that investment in human capital innovation and knowledge are significant contributors to economic growth and that the long run growth rates of Local Governments depend on policy implementation measures as well as local revenue mobilisation. Organisations need to take holistic approaches to improve their policy implementation efforts and the foundations on which to build success including provision of enough resources, planning and processes, leadership, foster a culture of commitment and use of improved technology (Ghiglino *et al*, 2018).

Decentralisation policy alone, cannot contribute much to the performance of UPE schools without the support from the central government since it is the central government that provides resources in the form of funds and materials like text books and other scholastic materials and this makes the theory of endogenous to be relevant to this study.

Decentralisation is usually referred to as the transfer of powers from central government to lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy (Crook & Manor, 1998; Agrawal &Ribot1999). In this study, political decentralisation was looked at in terms of giving the authority to local Governments to make decisions on how to run the UPE schools (Jandyala, 2009).

The District Education Officer (DEO) is the key person responsible for the implementation of education policies at the district level, directly works with the head teachers for any feedback to the Ministry of Education and Sports, and delegates head teachers within their different schools with authority to control school affairs. School level actors are at the last level of institutional structure involving different actors like head teachers, teachers, school management committees, parents' pupils and the community at large. In Katerera County the number of pupils sitting for primary leaving examinations has been increasing since 2009 up to date and the number of failures has also been increasing.

METHODS AND MATERIALS
Data Capturing
Data used for the research project was obtained using both primary and secondary sources .Primary data was arrived at by use of questionnaires and interviews to vital persons related to the study. Secondary data was got by the use of documentary reviews. The study employed a descriptive research design including qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Amin (2005) stated that descriptive research design is generally used to describe a phenomenon and its data characteristics. The researcher chose a total of 139 respondents (sample size) using the sloven's formula to participate in the study.

Sampling methods
The researcher employed simple random sampling, stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques in the study. The study population comprised of the target population including categories like teachers, pupils, parents, district officials, and local councils officials residing within Rubirizi district.

Structured questionnaire and interviews
The questionnaire is a research tool consisting of inter-related questions prepared by the researcher about the research dilemma under investigation based on the objectives of the research study. Items were set and written for the participants to answer with options as reflected on the likert scale type questions.

This method was liked because it covers a wide geographical space in data collection; it gathers a lot of information within a short period of time, and offers greater assurance regarding anonymity.

However, the questionnaire involved some challenges of attrition. There were few copies that were not returned, though this was solved by distributing a lot of copies than the required number of the sample size.

Interview schedule is an instrument of data collection which has something to do with face to face communication with respondents. The researcher posed questions which the respondents answered verbally. It was important in getting the story behind the participants' experience even through facial expressions. This tool was preferred because the information and data obtained was vital to the study. The aim of a qualitative interview schedule was to understand the respondents subjective view of their cosmos; unfolding the meaning of their world, uncovering their lived lifestyles prior to scientific explanations (Kvale&Brinkmann, 2009).

Validity and reliability of research instruments
Validity of the structured questionnaire was assured by using content validity Index. Arising from the testing of the validity of the instruments, the researcher got content validity index (CVI) of 0.78 which was well above 0.75 indicating that the instrument was valid to collect data for the research study (Amin, 2005). However, the validity of the

interviews was obtained by talking to key participants to prove the answered items (Gibbs, 2007).

Reliability of the Structured Questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient formula looking at the variables that had an alpha coefficient of figure greater than 0.70. Since the reliability calculation obtained by the researcher yielded 0.78 alpha value, it implied that the research instrument was reliable to elicit data necessary for the study. Nevertheless, the reliability of the interviews was reached at by resorting on peer review strategies (Gibbs, 2007).

Data analysis

Research Statistical tools which were employed to analyze data for this research study included; descriptive statistics such as tables, frequencies, percentages, and inferential analyses like Pearson Linear Correlation Coefficient for analyzing quantitative data. Generally, Qualitative data were analyzed by scientifically organizing data into rational themes or sub themes for easy Interpretation in a storyline manner (Gibbs, 2007).

Background Characteristics of the Respondents

Table-1: Distribution of Respondents by background characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	78	56.1
	Female	61	43.9
	Total	139	100
Age	10-19 Years	99	71.2
	20-30 Years	21	15.1
	31- 40 Years	13	9.4
	Above 40 Years	6	4.3
	Total	139	100.0
Marital status	Single	110	79.1
	Married	26	18.7
	Widowed	1	.7
	Separated/Divorced	2	1.4
	Total	139	100.0
Education Level	Primary	63	45.3
	Secondary	2	1.4
	Diploma	43	30.9
	Degree	31	22.3
	Total	139	100.0

Source: Primary data (2020)

The table 1 above shows the descriptive statistics on the background characteristics which were interpreted as follows;

On gender of the respondents, 56.1% were male and 43.9% of the respondents were female because the leadership positions were fairly shared by males and females. This shows that all gender was represented though did not have significant effect on the results.

Regarding age distribution of the respondents, most of the study respondents i.e. 71.2% were in the age group of 10-19 years because in this study primary prefects took the highest coverage and most of them were falling in this age category; 15.1% were in the age group of 20-30 years; 9.4% were in the age group of 31-40 years; and finally, only 4.3% were above 40 years. This shows that the majority of the respondents were in the age bracket that is directly involved in UPE programme.

On the marital status, most of the respondents i.e. 79.1% were single because most of the study participants were pupils' leaders who are always not married; 18.7% were married; 0.7% of the respondents were widowed; and finally, 1.4% of the respondents were separated/divorced. This meant that the study involved young people who were able to give valid information for a good study.

On the education level of the respondents, most of the respondents i.e. 45.3% were of primary; 30.9% were of diploma; 1.4% were of secondary, and finally, 22.3% of the respondents were degree holders. This indicates that all the respondents were able to read and write and this enabled the researcher to rely on the data obtained from using a questionnaire.

The relationship between political decentralisation and PLE performance of UPE schools in Katerera County.

The variables measuring political decentralisation were scaled using the five-point Likert scale where, 5= strongly agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree &1= strongly disagree

Table-2: Descriptive statistics on political 300ecentralization in Katerera County

Variable		SA	A	N	D	SD	Not responded
The central government has given authority to local government to manage education sector	N=139	66	38	17	15	0	3
	%ge	47.5%	27.3%	12.2%	10.8%	0%	2.2%
The local government makes decision on how to manage education sector	N=139	37	75	14	13	0	0
	%ge	26.6%	54.0%	10.1%	9.4%	0%	0%
The central government gives guidelines to local government on how to implement UPE programme	N=139	24	92	18	5	0	0
	%ge	17.3%	66.2%	12.9%	3.6%	0%	0%
The local governments are concerned on the performance of UPE programme	N=139	10	107	16	6	0	0
	%ge	7.2%	77.0%	11.5%	4.3%	0%	0%
There is good coordination between central government and local governments in implementing UPE programme	N=139	31	84	11	13	0	0
	%ge	22.3%	60.4%	7.9%	9.4%	0%	0%
The local government gives feedback on the performance of UPE programme	N=139	37	64	26	12	0	0
	%ge	26.6%	46.0%	18.7%	8.6%	0%	0%
Political leaders interfere in the implementation of UPE programme	N=139	29	75	19	16	0	0
	%ge	20.9%	54.0%	13.7%	11.5%	0%	0%

Source: Primary data (2020)

The results in the table 2 above showed that Most of the respondents 66(47.5%) strongly agreed to the statement that "The central government has given authority to local government to manage education sector"; 38(27.3%) agreed to the statement; 17(12.2%) were neutral to the statement; 15(10.8%) disagreed and none of the respondents strongly disagreed; and 3(2.2%) did not respond to this statement. This meant that the central government of Uganda has given authority the local government of Rubirizi to manage the education section sector through the programme of decentralization and better results should be expected.

Most of the respondents 75(54.0%) agreed to the statement that "The local government makes decision on how to manage education sector"; 37(26.6%) strongly agreed to the statement; 14(10.1%) were neutral to the statement; 13(9.4%) disagreed and none of the respondents strongly disagreed. This indicates that the local government of Rubirizi district in western Uganda is able to make decisions on how to manage the education sector.

Most of the respondents 92(66.2%) agreed to the statement that "The central government gives guidelines to local government on how to implement UPE programme"; 24(17.3%) strongly agreed to the statement; 18(12.9) % were neutral to the statement; 5(3.6%) disagreed and none of the respondents strongly disagreed. This suggested that the district of Rubirizi in western Uganda obtains the guidelines from the central government in regard to implementation of UPE programmes and that the sub-national government must comply for development.

Most of the respondents 107(77.0%) agreed to the statement that "The local governments are concerned on the performance of UPE program"; 10(7.2%) strongly agreed to the statement; 16(11.5%)

were neutral to the statement; 6(4.3%) disagreed and none of the respondents strongly disagreed. This implied that decentralization as a policy has encouraged the spirit of citizen responsiveness to government educational programs.

Most of the respondents 84(60.4%) agreed to the statement of "There is good coordination between central government and local governments in implementing UPE programme"; 31(22.3%) strongly agreed to the statement; 11(7.9%) were neutral to the statement; 13(9.4%) disagreed and none of the respondents strongly disagreed. This meant that the central government is able to coordinate with the local governments in implementing the UPE programme and that if the centre cannot hold, then, things fall apart.

Most of the respondents 64(46.0%) agreed to the statement that "The local government gives feedback on the performance of UPE programme"; 37(26.6%) strongly agreed to the statement; 26(18.7%) were neutral to the statement; 12(8.6%) disagreed and none of the respondents strongly disagreed. This meant that the local governments are able to give feedback on the performance of UPE programme and that there is a cordial relations between the centre and sub-national governments for development.

Most of the respondents 75(54.0%) agreed to the statement of "Political leaders interfere in the implementation of UPE programme"; 29(20.9%) strongly agreed to the statement; 19(13.7%) were neutral to the statement; 16(11.5%) of the respondents disagreed. This meant that the political leaders interfere in the implementation of UPE programme as most of the respondents agreed so. It also suggested that sometimes there are clashes between local governments and central governments that may hinder growth and development in the country.

The relationship between political decentralisation and PLE performance of UPE schools in Katerera County.

Table-3: Relationship between political decentralization and UPE performance

Correlations			
		Political Decentralization	PLE Performance of UPE Schools
Political Decentralization	Pearson Correlation	1	.593**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	139	130
Performance of UPE Schools	Pearson Correlation	.593**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	139	139
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Primary data (2020)

The study found out that political decentralization significantly (p=0.000<0.05) influenced the performance of UPE schools in Katerera County in Rubirizi district in Uganda. Also, there was a moderate positive relationship (r=0.593) between political decentralization and PLE performance of UPE schools in Katerera County. In this context, political decentralization improved the performance of UPE schools in Katerera County; because it improved supervision of schools for example the councilors and LCIII chair persons in Katerera County were responsible of supervising the day to day activities and the performance of the UPE schools in their sub counties as it was part of their political manifestos to improve education service delivery. This implied that the set null hypothesis was rejected saying that political decentralization has a strong bearing on UPE performance in Uganda.

The above finding was supported by the chairman Local Council Five (LCV) at district level who was interviewed on 5th December 2020 at Rubirizi district headquarters and generally said that
"They implement decentralisation in the education sector most especially in the UPE schools through passing the reviewing and education department budget, and receiving the UPE funds on behalf of schools rather than head teachers receiving fund direct from the central government. They also do accountability and auditing of UPE funds at the Local government level and of course this has always helped our UPE schools to perform better".

In this context, the interview also support that political decentralization improves PLE performance of UPE schools in Katerera County in a way that through auditing of the UPE funds in schools, there is proper allocation which results into effective use and better performance.

CONCLUSIONS
Decentralization policy implementation had a significant effect on the PLE performance of UPE schools in Katerera County, Rubirizi district in Uganda by contributing 61.0% to performance of UPE schools.

Political decentralization significantly (p=0.000<0.05) influenced PLE performance of UPE schools in Katerera County in Rubirizi district in Uganda indicating that the set null hypothesis by the researcher was rejected. . Also, there was a moderate positive relationship (r=0.593) between political decentralization and PLE performance of UPE schools in Katerera County meaning that improvement in the quality of political decentralization increases UPE performance.

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