Attitudinal variables affecting education reforms and quality of primary education in Uganda

Aida Nyenje and James Nkata

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Aida Nyenje1* and James Nkata1

Abstract: This paper establishes the extent to which attitudinal variables affect the education reforms and subsequently the quality of primary education in Uganda. The paper is based on the views of a wide spectrum of different education stakeholders including: policy analysts, Members of Parliament (MPs), education officers, Headteachers, teaching staff, school directors, parents, and school management committees. The variables under study include: school culture, religion of the school, freedom of expression, parents’ attitude toward the school, the learners’ attitude toward the school, and achievement of expectations. It was realized that the reform of Uganda’s Primary Education System is mostly determined by three elements within the attitudinal dynamics. First, majority of the respondents 336 (93.1%) agreed that parents’ attitudes toward the school affect quality of primary education; 331 (91.7%) concurred that learners’ attitude toward the school affects the quality of primary education and lastly; 320 (88.6%) agreed that achievement of expectations affects the quality of primary education. In addition, all elements of attitudinal dynamics, according to the regression analysis accounted for 19.7% of the variations in the quality of primary education.

Subjects: Educational Research; Primary/Elementary Education; School Leadership, Management & Administration

Keywords: quality of primary education; attitudinal dynamics; education reforms

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*Corresponding author: Aida Nyenje, East African School of Higher Education Studies and Development (EASHESD), Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda
E-mail: alnyenje@outlook.com

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Aida Nyenje is a PhD candidate in Education Management at Makerere University. She holds a bachelor's degree in Education and a master's degree in Public Administration and Management, both from Makerere University. Aida has a special interest in conducting education reform-related research and promoting quality of education interventions. She has worked with Wakiso district local government, where she excelled in enhancing Universal Primary Education and mentoring of teachers into leadership positions in the district. Currently she is a consultant at Uganda Management Institute, involved in preparing teaching programs, lecturing in class, assessing participants and supervision of master’s dissertations. She recently conducted training of all education managers in the country on mainstreaming gender and enhancing school community involvement.

James Nkata is the director general of Uganda Management institute. He has extensive experience in the field of education.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

A number of education reforms have been introduced in Uganda over the last two decades. However, rooted within those reforms are attitudinal, structural, and institutional dynamics which, depending on how they are addressed, might have a bearing on the failure or success of the reforms. This article presents the attitudinal aspects of the reform dynamics, based on data that was gathered from a number of stakeholders who included policy analysts, teacher’s head teachers, education officers, school management committee members, parent’s teacher’s association members, and members of parliament. Results show that quality of primary education varied by 19.7% in respect to attitudinal dynamics. Clearly, attitudinal aspects such as school culture, attitudes of learners and parents towards the school, can invariably affect the quality of primary education. Therefore, understanding and appreciating such dynamics before the onset of any education reforms can avert likely failure in an effort to improve the quality of primary education.
1. Introduction

In January 1997, Uganda propelled its Universal Primary Education (UPE) Program (Seven years of school from age 6 to 12), which delivers free primary school education for all Ugandan children. The goal was to enroll and eventually provide primary education for every child. As a consequence of this program, primary school enrollment increased enormously; this resulted into challenges associated with the quality of primary education in Uganda.

A gap in Uganda's current primary education system and the long overdue change in the primary school curriculum is not a new issue, but one that has cropped up over the last few years. This article is based on a study of Uganda's recent undertaking to reform her primary school education system; it is informed by earlier studies that focused on the probable outcomes of educational reforms. The researcher looks at how attitudes of the major stakeholders may affect the education reforms and thus the quality of education whenever such reforms are contemplated, with specific focus on the ongoing Ugandan primary education reform process. The discourse concludes that the quality of Uganda's primary education reform has significantly been affected by the attitudes of majorly three stakeholders: the parents, the learners, and the school heads.

The study revolves around the effect of attitudinal dynamics of education reforms on the quality of primary education in Uganda. Attitudinal dynamics refer to behavior, values, perceptions, and expectations of stakeholders, namely; policy-makers, education managers, headteachers, school staff, children, and parents (Mullins, 2005; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009), who must see to it that the reform process takes shape and achieves the intended outcomes. The objective of this research was to determine the effect of attitudinal dynamics on education reform and the quality of primary education in Uganda. A hypothesis that attitudinal dynamics of education reform have no significant effect on the quality of primary education was tested.

In his evaluation of the impact of Uganda's program of “Universal Primary Education” which removed payment of tuition for primary enrollment so as to increase primary school attendance Deininger (2003), noted that the program contributed to the general decline in the quality of education. Grogan (2009) examined the initial effect of the introduction of UPE and showed that school fees elimination under UPE led to a 3% increase particularly for girls and children living in rural areas.

Puamau (2005) stated that colonial legacy theoretical framework and UNESCO (2012) were the benchmarks for educational reforms and quality in primary education. Wood (2008), focused on Uganda's postcolonial, context characterized by elitist education structures, high illiteracy rates, limited access, extensive poverty, political chaos, oppression, guerrilla insurgency, influx of refugees, Internally Displaced People (IDPs), and hard-to-reach populations. Mullins (2007) characterizes attitudinal dynamics as knowledge, ego-defensive, instrumental, and expressive functions. The knowledge function reflected attitudinal dynamics behind interpretation and classification of information about education reforms. Leithwood et al. (2009) stated the implementation and sustainability of change, therefore, is dependent on the nature of the intervention and the degree to which it is consistent with individual beliefs, values, and practices collected on individual characteristics, including exposure to risk factors, alongside information about the outcome.

All the above authors emphasize the importance of attitude on the success of the reform program and its ability to enhance the quality of primary education.

2. Methodology

A cross-sectional survey research design was used because it allowed for the collection of data from different categories of respondents and gave greater latitude of obtaining large samples, which allowed better generalizations. It was an appropriate method of data collection, not only because surveys are among the most commonly used tools to collect data (Worthen, White, & Sudweeks, 1999), but also because they permit for a thorough investigation of the phenomenon through the collection of a large amount of data from a variety of respondents in a relatively short period of time.
Furthermore, a survey was deemed profitable in this study because it accommodates a variety of methods with a data-gathering strategy that can facilitate a qualitative and quantitative understanding of the study problem (Amin, 2005; Hammond & Dennison, 1995). When applying the cross-sectional survey design, data are collected using mainly interviews and questionnaires and is often analyzed using descriptive analysis (Meyer, 1999). However, in this particular study, a two-pronged approach of quantitative and qualitative approaches were adopted. Data collection methods included interview method, Questionnaire survey method, and documentary review method.

2.1. Sampling

The purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of the respondents who included; Members of Parliament (MPs), education officers, policy analysts, SMC and PTA members. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to select respondents on the basis of their knowledge about primary education reforms and their experience in managing primary school affairs. According to Du Gay (1996), purposive sampling enables the study to acquire an in-depth understanding of the study. In addition, four districts were purposively selected from rural and urban areas in four regions in Uganda; central, northern, western and eastern regions. Tongco (2007) wrote that informant selection for purposive sampling is highly relevant for ethno-botanical research, as people are constantly looked upon for knowledge and information and that choosing the purposive sample is fundamental to the quality of data gathered which maybe be used with both qualitative and quantitative research techniques.

On the other hand, the simple random sampling technique was used to select Headteachers/school directors/deputy Headteachers and teachers. Random sampling in this respect strengthened the external validity of the study (Amin, 2005) that is at the district and regional levels. Besides, the simple random method facilitates generation of quick responses especially with large samples and allows equal and independent chance of being selected for the sample (Amin, 2005; Du Gay, 1996). This facilitates predictions and generalizations about the population, on the basis of statistically valid results (Buglear, 2007). Random sampling was therefore the best way to obtain representative samples for the study. The sample was based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of samples for finite populations. Table 1 shows the sample size and sample selection for the various categories of respondents.

2.2. Data analysis

The data collected in this paper was organized, sorted, and interpreted in order to attach meaning to it (Maxwell, 1996). Data was collected directly from the different schools; the unit of analysis was at the school level, which was the preferred approach when examining school performance (Creemers, 1996; Mugimu, 2004). During data collection, careful scrutiny of the captured data was done to ensure consistency, accuracy, and completeness of the questionnaire and in-depth interview guides. Later, data was edited, coded, and entered into the computer and subsequently analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Data was both quantitative and qualitative.

| Table 1. Sample size selection |
|--------------------------------|
| Categories                  | Study population | Sample | Sampling technique | Instrument |
| SMC and PTA                 | 100              | 80     | Purposive          | Questionnaire |
| Headteachers/school directors/ Deputy Headteachers | 286              | 162    | Simple random      | Questionnaire |
| Teachers                    | 3,552            | 346    | Simple random      | Questionnaire |
| County Education officers   | 9                | 9      | Purposive          | Interview guide |
| Policy analysts             | 10               | 10     | Purposive          | Interview guide |
| MPs                         | 5                | 5      | Purposive          | Interview guide |
| Total                       | 3,962            | 612    | –                  | –            |
2.3. Validity
The validity of the instruments was determined using experts in survey research design, who analyzed and judged the suitability of the instrument’s items to the study objectives. The study applied a content validity measure to determine the validity of the instruments. Miles and Huberman (1984) advise that the only sure way to determine content validity is to seek expert opinion. The validity of the questionnaire and interview guide was reached after 10 research experts; including the study’s advisors analyzed the questionnaire and interview guide to ascertain their validity. Items that were found wanting were fine-tuned or eliminated. Content Validity Index (CVI) of each research instrument was established. The CVI for the questionnaire was .88 and that for the interview guide was .85. The high CVI (of .88 and .85, close to 1) suggests a high validity of the instruments used in this study, which renders the results scientifically credible.

2.4. Reliability
The internal consistency and reliability of the instrument was measured using Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) coefficient, taking only variables with an \( \alpha \) coefficient value of more than \( = \alpha > .57 \) accepted for social research (Amin, 2005; Schneider & Dachler, 1978). The study approximated the reliability coefficient of \( (r = .57) \) as was recommended by Schneider and Dachler (1978). The reliability generated from SPSS for each variable used in this study and the results are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 shows that Attitudinal Dynamics yielded Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) .740, Structural Dynamics yielded Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) .805, Institutional Dynamics yielded Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) .645 and Education Reforms yielded Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) .950. Since all the variables yielded \( \alpha \) values above .57 accepted for social research (Schreider & Dachler, 1978), it was concluded that the instrument was consistent in measuring education reforms and quality of primary education in Uganda.

2.5. Triangulation
In this research, the study used a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative approaches of data collection and analysis. Triangulation strengthened the validity of this study, for it provided corroborating evidence collected through interviews, documents, and questionnaire (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The use of multiple instruments was particularly helpful in validating the authenticity of the data obtained from the schools and respondents. Use of multiple analysts to record interview transcripts reinforced the comments on interpretations and tracing emerging patterns.

2.6. Ethical considerations
Leedy (1993) observes that ethical considerations in social science research pivot on honesty, disclosure of methods, confidentiality guarantees, and voluntary informed consent, among others. The researcher acknowledges that the need to obtain accurate, valid and reliable data obligated the study to access information that could be regarded as confidential or even embarrassing. Scrutiny of documents scheduling interviews with busy officials was quite intrusive, which could have raised some ethical issues.

To further ensure anonymity, the true identity of the schools and participants in the study were concealed. In cases where there was only one respondent holding a particular office, the identity of the respondent was not made obvious in situations that involved embarrassing information. In this
respect, pseudonyms were used without losing the meaning of the information. Similarly, the effect of the study on participants’ professional reputation and the reputation of the schools involved were given utmost consideration.

Secondly, the study made sure that interviews took place in a secure environment. The researcher also assured participants that the information they would provide would be treated as confidential. Indeed, appropriate measures were taken to keep the data as confidential as possible. It was also agreed upon with participants in writing that once the study was over, all audio recordings would be permanently destroyed, a promise that was duly kept by the researcher.

Thirdly, participants were fully informed about the research by giving them verbal explanations before they assented to taking part in it. The explanations were particularly important for respondents outside the schools. It was made clear that participants had the right to: decline to participate in the study or answer any questions if they did not wish to do so, or withdraw from the study without penalties, or reject being audio-recorded. Participants that consented were asked to append their signatures on the letter of informed consent.

Lastly, consideration of whether the study findings would help to improve practice was a potential ethical issue because many respondents raised concern about many issues that need to be addressed, if brought into the light. In this respect, the researcher intends to disseminate the findings of this study by availing the study report to all stakeholders through appropriate means.

3. Results and discussion
In the first instance, the study sought to establish the stakeholders’ opinions about the extent to which attitudinal dynamics affects the quality of primary education as shown in Table 3. A five-point Likert scale of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) was used. However, for purposes of analysis, the data were summarized as; agree, not sure and disagree.

Results in Table 3 reveal that of the 361 respondents, 266 (73.7) % of the respondents agreed that school religious beliefs are highly given much priority, while 94 (26%) disagreed and only 1 (0.3%) was not sure. These findings indicate that religious beliefs are greatly valued in primary schools (PS)
thereby exhibiting a disciplined environment that eventually leads to assumed quality of primary education. In regard to whether school stakeholder’s values are respected, majority of the respondents 296 (82%) agreed, 63 (17.4%) disagreed and 2 (0.6%) were not sure. These results show that the school administrators of the PS are aware that if the values of the stakeholders are respected, it has a positive effect on the quality of education. As for considering the school culture, nearly three quarters of the respondents 261 (72.3%) agreed that school culture is considered, 3 (0.8%) were not sure and 97 (26.9%) disagreed. The results illustrate that the school culture is of great importance in determining the quality of primary education. The findings in Table 3 further reveal that most of the respondents 286 (79.2%) agreed, whereas 3 (0.8%) were not sure and 72 (20%) were not in agreement that people are free to express their perceptions. The results show that where there is a democratic environment in perception expression, quality of primary education is enhanced.

For the achievement of people’s expectations, 320 (88.6%) respondents agreed, 5 (1.4%) were not sure and 36 (10%) disagreed. These findings demonstrate that the needs of the stakeholders are understood and therefore quality services are provided deriving quality primary education. For the case of parents having a positive attitude towards a school, 336 (93.1%) respondents were in agreement, 3 (0.8%) were not sure and 22 (6.1%) disagreed. Results indicate that the highest numbers of respondents agree that if parents loved and supported the school in most of its activities this contributes to quality education. On the aspect of whether learners’ attitude towards the school was positive, 331 (91.7%) did agree, while 5 (1.3%) showed that they were not sure and 25 (7%) disagreed. The results show that if there is a friendly learning environment that attracts learners to stay in school, enjoy the school and therefore quality education is achieved.

Overall, results in Table 3 shows that among all the items that were used to assess respondents’ views on attitudinal dynamics and their effect on the quality of primary education, parents’ positive attitude towards the school \( (M = 4.16; SD = .795) \) and learners’ positive attitude towards the school \( (M = 4.23 \) and \( SD = .696) \) registered the highest number of respondents indicating agreement. This therefore means that the attitudes of the parents and learners have a paramount influence on education reforms and consequently, on the quality of primary education.

During interviews, several reasons were given by different respondents why attitudinal dynamics are important. According to one headteacher from western Uganda:

The success or failure of the school largely depends on the attitude the parents have about the school … if the attitude is positive, if they like the school, they will support its programs and if they don’t, for whatever reasons, they will undermine it. For example if parents choose not to send their children to school, the school will not survive … even the amount of UPE grants we receive from government depends on the level of enrolment …

Explaining the effect of parental attitude on the quality of education, one District Education Officer (DEO) from the central region observed:

Before UPE was introduced, Nakasero Primary Schools (PS), Kittante PS, Buganda Road PS, Shimon PS and Bat Valley PS were always among the best ten in the country, but when UPE came along, the rich transferred their children to good private schools such as Green Hill PS, Sir Apollo Kagwa PS, City Parents PS etc. … the reason was because rich parents have a negative attitude towards UPE … and perhaps they are right because the once legendary schools are now in oblivion …

In a similar development, one politician from the western region had this to say about the attitudinal dynamics:
... we encourage parents to enroll and keep their children in schools that we as the elite can never dare enroll our own children ..., teaching in local language would have been much easier if we had a national language like Kenya and Tanzania have, but people's attitude towards the most viable languages is negative ... even attempts to improve the curriculum provokes religious and tribal sentiments that could undermine well intentioned reforms ...

Teachers observed that their attitude towards UPE and other reform was poor because UPE deprived them of the PTA allowance and other sources of income that would enable them make ends meet, yet government salary was very inadequate. Headteachers lamented over parents’ indifference towards the school programs because they took it for granted that education was free. It was such negative attitudes that largely undermined the quality of education in most public schools compared to some private schools.

To establish the strength and direction of the relationship between attitudinal dynamics and quality of primary education, Pearson’s correlation analysis was conducted. Results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Results in the Table 4 indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between attitudinal dynamics and quality of primary education as given by coefficient of correlation of .444. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis that attitudinal dynamics of education reform significantly affect the quality of primary education was affirmed (upheld). The results imply that there’s need to consider stakeholders in the reform process as it relates to how community members react to the reforms. This includes addressing issues of the culture within the different schools, as well as responding to the feelings and attitudes expressed by the people toward education reforms. Attitudinal dynamics therefore affect the ability of Primary School Education Reforms (PSER’s) to promote the quality of primary education.

In assessing the effect of attitudinal dynamics, the views of the different stakeholders were examined. These stakeholders included policy analysts, Members of Parliament (MPs), education officers, Headteachers, teaching staff, school directors, parents, and school management committees as shown in Table 5.

The results indicate that attitudinal dynamics explain 19.7% variation in quality of primary education; the rest of the variation could be explained by other unknown factors, which means that

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### Table 4. The relationship between attitudinal dynamics and quality of primary education

| Attitudinal dynamics | Pearson correlation | Quality primary education |
|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Attitudinal dynamics | 1.000              |                          |
| Sig. (two-tailed)    | .000               | .444**                   |
| N                    | 361                | 361                      |

Source: Primary data.

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

### Table 5. Regression model results showing the effect of attitudinal dynamics on quality of primary education

| Model | $R$ | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ | Std. error of the estimate | Change statistics |
|-------|-----|-------|----------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
|       |     |       |                |                           | $R^2$ change  | $F$ change | df1 | df2 | Sig. $F$ change |
| 1     | .444*| .197  | .195           | .387                      | .197             | 12.732     | 1   | 359 | .000          |

Source: Primary data.

*Predictors: (Constant), attitudinal dynamics.
attitudinal dynamics account for 19.7% of the variations in the quality of primary education. Thus, if attitudinal dynamics were considered, the quality of primary education would improve by 19.7% and if they were ignored, the quality of education would decline by the same percentage. This was clearly evident in the sentiments expressed by one DEO who remarked that some parents have a negative attitude toward UPE and that it explains why they would not take their children to UPE schools where teaching is done in local languages.

Table 6 shows that parental attitude toward PSERs ($\beta = 2.456$) at statistical significance (Sig = .004) is a major determinant of the quality of primary education in Uganda. During interviews, it was stressed that parents played an important role in the effectiveness of PSER because they had authority over pupils who were the major targets of reforms.

| Categories of respondents | Unstandardized coefficients | Standardized coefficients | $T$ | Sig. |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----|------|
| (Constant)                | 1.992                       | .746                      | 2.671 | .228 |
| Policy analysts           | .638                        | .492                      | .871 | 1.297 | .018 |
| Politicians (MPs)         | .139                        | .170                      | .190 | .818  | .563 |
| Professionals             | −.250                       | .450                      | −.369 | −.555 | .677 |
| Education officers        | −.326                       | .372                      | −.431 | −.877 | .542 |
| Headteachers              | .294                        | .451                      | .466 | .653  | .032 |
| Teaching staff            | −.353                       | .405                      | −.494 | −.871 | .544 |
| School directors          | −.303                       | .305                      | −.313 | −.994 | .502 |
| Parents (PTA)             | 2.769                       | 1.435                     | 2.456 | 1.930 | .004 |
| Management (SMC’s)        | .971                        | .320                      | .800 | 3.036 | .203 |

Source: Primary data.

4. Conclusion

The key finding of the study was that parents’ and learners’ attitudes stood out as the most significant in terms of enhancing quality of primary education. It should be noted that both categories play a central role in as far as quality of education is concerned; parents can monitor the progress of their children, whether they are actually studying and what they are studying. Where parents play their part, the quality of education can be enhanced. On the other hand, learners are at the center of the education system and their attitude will determine whether they attend school as required and whether they pay attention to the instructions of the teachers, among others. The results were in harmony with views from earlier studies in the literature review, which showed that expectations of parents have a powerful influence on schools and that parental and community support contributed enormously to strengthening the effectiveness of the schools (Wasley, Hampel, & Clark, 2007; Murphy & Hallinger, 2008).

It was thus recommended that: (a) the designers of the reforms should give ample time and greatly consider the stakeholders’ beliefs, religions, values, cultures, perceptions, expectations, and attitudes in designing education reforms; (b) the policy analysts and implementers of reforms should effectively monitor, evaluate, and constantly review the education policy being implemented in PS; this will improve the quality of primary education and; (c) government should periodically carry out baseline surveys to gauge trends and needs among stake holders and tailor reforms to address their concerns.
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Author details
Aida Nyenje
E-mail: dinyaenyje@outlook.com
James Nkata
E-mail: jnkata@yahoo.com

1 East African School of Higher Education Studies and Development (EASHESD), Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

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