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CHAPTER

Universal Primary Education in East Africa: Globalisation and Local Enactment

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Abstract

Universal Primary Education (UPE) was launched in Uganda in 1997, Tanzania in 2001, and Kenya in 2003, marking their actualisation of Education for All's (EFA) globalisation of primary education. This chapter investigates EFA's reform of UPE in partnership with the three East African countries, premised on the following question: What underlined EFA's globalisation of UPE in East Africa? What entailed UPE's local enactment, and why did the reforms succeed or fail? It combines an in-depth literature review, secondary document analysis, and a case study of two UPE schools in Uganda. The findings reveal that in globalising UPE, EFA advocated four policy technologies: top-down performance management, competition and contestability, choice and voice, and capability and capacity to standardise primary education. In alignment with EFA, the East African countries enacted performativity, liberalisation, universalisation, and reprofessionalisation of teachers. Owing to contextual imperatives, they prudently recontextualised the policy technologies. Uganda chose gradual universalisation with four children per household, Kenya opted for deconcentration instead of decentralisation, while Tanzania opted for gradual liberalisation leading to hybridity. Contrary to their intended goals, the reforms have culminated mainly in first-order changes, such as high gross rather than net enrolment. This study argues that reform implementers should respond to contextual conditions to offset their confounding effects.

Keywords: [globalisation](#), [curriculum enactment](#), [Education for All](#), [universal primary education](#), [East Africa](#)

Subject: [African History](#), [Educational Strategies and Policy](#)

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Introduction

In conformance with Education for All (EFA), basic education mandates earlier ratified at Jomtein in 1990, Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya each launched universal primary education (UPE) in 1997, 2001, and 2003, respectively (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990; Orodho, 2014; Shukia, 2020; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019). According to the EFA declaration, globalisation aims to integrate primary education into the framework of global educational planning (UNESCO, 2014). The EFA argued that ‘education is too diverse, complex and demanding to expect governments alone to be able to meet the vast array of learners’ needs’ (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990, p. 29). Consequently, it mandated standard policy technologies such as top-down performance management, competition and contestability, choice and voice, and capability and capacity to standardise basic education globally (see Ball, 2017; Inter-Agency Commission, 1990; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019).

Globalisation commenced in East African countries following the adoption of the World Bank’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (Orodho 2014; Pesha 2016; Robertson et al., 2007; World Bank 2004). The unique appropriations in each country have impacted the process, leading to a proliferation of hybridity and mainly first-order changes (Priestley, 2011; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019).

UNESCO (2014, n.p.) defines the UPE as ‘a system of universal, compulsory and free primary education for all’. Moussa and Omoeva (2020, p. 183) offer it as a government programme of ‘improving access to and enrolment in primary school by eliminating tuition fees’, while Muricho and Chang’ach (2013, p. 132) define it as education which ‘ensures that all children eligible for primary schooling have opportunity to enrol and remain in schools to learn and acquire quality basic education’. This implies that UPE constitutes free, government-funded universal primary education.

Verger et al. (2018, pp. 3–4) define globalisation as a

constitutive process of increasing interdependence between people, territories and organisations in the economic, political and cultural domains. . . . globalisation can be characterised as hyper-liberalism in the economic domain, governance without government in the political domain, and commodification and consumerism in the cultural one.

Saltman (2020, p. 2) explicates neoliberal globalisation, which argues that

Education should be a private industry rather than a public good and expands corporate culture, managerialism, commercialism and consumerism into education. . . . The standards and accountability movement exemplifies this market-based shift, with . . . a drastic increase in standardised testing and teaching to the test.

Neoliberalism advocates for an investment approach to education underpinned by privatisation and efficiency (Ball, 2017; Verger et al., 2016). It champions free enterprise and the subordination of state influence (Verger et al., 2016). Neoliberalism argues that free trade is the only road to increased prosperity; consequently, government expenditure on education should be minimised (Verger et al., 2016). It calls for indirect education governance, that is, governance without government underpinned by partnerships, decentralisation, and performativity (Verger et al., 2018). Neoliberalism espouses a liberal Western culture of commodification and consumerism (Verger et al., 2016).

This study combined a comprehensive literature review on basic education reform in East African countries, secondary document analysis, and a case study of two UPE schools in Uganda and related channels to explicate the EFA’s primary education reforms. The research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. What has underlined EfA's globalisation of primary education in East Africa?
2. What has characterised local stakeholders' enactment of the EfA's reforms?
3. How and why did the reform processes succeed or fail?

Despite key East African studies, for example, Tromp and Datzberger (2019), Kabay (2021), and Kan and Klasen (2020) on Uganda, the former dwells mainly on Uganda's recontextualisation of the UPE reforms and its outcomes, Kabay (2021) interrogates the access versus quality debate, while the latter examines education attainment explicitly, which renders them limited in scope. Shukia (2020) and Pesha (2016) interrogate selected contextual elements in Tanzania's reform, such as quality, enrolment, and parental contribution, but stop short of a comprehensive analysis. Although Orodho (2014) compares quality and equity under the UPE, its focus is limited to Tanzania and Kenya. Other noteworthy studies, for example, Lindsjö (2018) and Matete (2016), focus on a single element (i.e., quality or decentralisation) and are limited. This study undertakes a broad comparative analysis of the UPE reforms across the three East African countries and their local enactment and outcomes. Consequently, it may shed more light on the EfA's globalisation of primary education, stakeholders' local enactment, and outcomes. The following section outlines Ball's (2017) and Ball and colleagues' (2011) conceptual models for the neoliberal globalisation of basic education and its local enactment, respectively.

Neoliberal Globalisation and Local Enactment of Basic Education

Ball (2017) posits a four-policy technologies framework in his attempt to explicate the neoliberal globalisation of basic education. In turn, Ball et al. (2011,) propose a framework for interrogating its local enactment, or *glocalisation*.

Top-down performance management is the first in Ball's (2017) policy technologies framework. It is underpinned by the discourse that education is no longer fit for purpose, which justifies reforms. It introduces national education targets which reconceptualise the education system as an element of national economic competitiveness. It incorporates league tables¹ in governance, mediatises policy, and employs surveillance accompanied by audit, inspection, testing, and comparison regimes.

The second is competition and contestability, which involves endogenous and exogenous privatisation. Endogenous privatisation turns schools into more business-like quasi-market systems by emphasising efficiency and competitive choice through linking funding to recruitment and consumer choice and tweaking to avoid cream-skimming/exclusions. Exogenous contestability promotes the entry of new private schools, flexible contracting, and outsourcing to diversify providers.

The third mechanism is choice and voice, which places power in the hands of service users in an open, diverse, and flexible system. It envisages increased competition, local community involvement, and new ways of tackling deprivation and traditionalism. It incentivises improvements in standards, equality, and personalisation; reconfigures the learning environment with new spaces and time frames; and incorporates new technologies aimed at commodification. It blends neoliberalism with classic liberalism by mixing philanthropy, social enterprise, and market-oriented solutions.

Lastly, the fourth mechanism involves strengthening the capability and capacity of school staff to deliver improved services. It promotes a new discourse of leadership that blends intervention and devolution (emphasising responsiveness, efficiency, performance improvement, and collaboration/partnership). Through reprofessionalisation and deprofessionalisation (closer scrutiny of teachers' jobs), teachers are remodelled as units of labour to be managed and paid based on performance.

Ball (2017) perceives neoliberal globalisation as modelling the internal and external relations of schooling on commercial/market institutions, which renders education a commodity for profit.

Also, the local enactment of globalisation policies, which Ball and colleagues (2011) term *glocalisation*, underlines how local stakeholders deal with policy demands, that is, how schools and agents within them creatively interpret and translate policies into practice within their given contextual positions and resources. Buenfil-Burgos (2000) argues that global policies imply certain homogenisation of values and measures, but these are mediated by historical, cultural, economic, and political conditions in particular sites. Thus, globalisation should not be perceived as a totalitarian transformation toward the same outcome since unique appropriations may lead to a proliferation of hybridity (Tromp & Datzberger, 2019). Ball et al. (2011, p. 21) identify four contextual (overlapping) spheres to explain this interplay:

1. Situated contexts (e.g., locale, student intakes, settings, and school histories)
2. Professional cultures (e.g., teacher/staff values, commitments and experiences, policy management in schools)
3. Material contexts (e.g., staffing, budget, buildings, technology, and infrastructure)
4. External context (e.g., quality of local authority support, pressures from evaluations such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions, legal requirements and responsibilities)

By interrogating glocalisation within these spheres, it is possible to comprehensively decipher how policy is translated from text into practice and enacted within schools.

Globalisation of UPE in East Africa

Partnerships, Decentralisation, and Performativity Governance

Following each respective country's launch of UPE, it undertook governance reforms mainly comprised of partnerships, decentralisation, and performativity in the different curriculum layers. Uganda formed its Education Sector Consultative Committee (ESCC) as the UPE's oversight organ in collaboration with Efa (Eilor, 2004). The ESCC subsequently implemented Uganda's Education Strategic Investment Plan in 1998 (Ward et al., 2006). Similarly, Tanzania formed its Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC) in 1997, which launched its Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) and the UPE in 2001 (Orodho, 2014). Kenya launched its Education Sector Support Programme in partnership with the Efa, culminating in the UPE in 2003 (Orodho, 2014).

Decentralisation was advanced for enhanced service provision (Matete, 2016; Suzuki, 2002). Uganda passed its Local Government Act in 1997, opening the way for decentralisation. The ESDP decentralised Tanzania in 2002 (Matete, 2016). Meanwhile, Kenya adopted a mixture of deconcentration, devolution, and school autonomy (Grauwe & Lugaz, 2011). The East African countries further integrated indirect steering or performativity (see Priestley et al., 2015) into the UPE's governance. Uganda actualised it through the outcomes-based thematic curriculum, high-stakes Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) and the mediatisation of exam results (Ogwang, 2023). Similarly, Kenya and Tanzania draw on competency-based curricula (CBC) and high-stakes PLEs as accountability mechanisms (Atuhurra & Kaffenberger, 2022; Maiyuria et al., 2024; Wamalwa et al., 2019).

Universalisation and Liberalisation

The East African countries pursued universalisation and liberalisation of primary education. Uganda abolished tuition and Parent Teacher Association fees and took responsibility for infrastructure and textbooks, as did Tanzania and Kenya (Kabay, 2021; Kan & Klasen, 2020; Lindsjö, 2018; Orodho, 2014; Pesha, 2016). Parents maintained responsibility for uniforms, scholastic materials, and school meals (Kabay, 2021; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019). Uganda and Kenya liberalised primary education provision through local and international edu-preneurs such as Bridge International Academies (Riep, 2017; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019; Zuilkowski et al., 2018).

The EfA mobilised funding at the supra level through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries programme and the Fast Track Initiative to finance the UPE quality reforms mainly through exogenous privatisation (Bermingham, 2011; World Bank, 2004). Uganda subsequently launched its Instructional Materials Unit (IMU), School Facilities Grant (SFG), and Capitation Grant to competitively procure instructional materials, infrastructure construction, and basic school supplies, respectively (Ogwang, 2023). Similarly, Tanzania launched its Development Fund (DF) and Capitation Grant (Lindsjö, 2018; Matete, 2016). Quality reform further involved streamlining teacher preparation and motivation. Uganda established its Teacher Development Management System (TDMS), while Tanzania launched its Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP), which focused on the training and management of teachers (Ogwang, 2023; Pesha, 2016).

End-User Participation in School Environment Reforms

School environmental reform was undertaken in East Africa with active parental participation to improve nutrition and curb abuse (Ogwang, 2023). Uganda partnered with The Right of All Children to Education programme, culminating in its School Feeding policy, which maintained parents' responsibility for school meals (Ogwang, 2018). This was emulated by both Tanzania and Kenya (Lindsjö, 2018; Matete, 2016; Shukia, 2020). Uganda and Kenya also banned corporal punishment, which Tanzania still maintains (Kalolo & Kapinga, 2023; Matofari, 2021; Ogwang, 2023).

CBC

The EfA promoted more CBC approaches emphasising literacy, numeracy, and life skills, its so-called globalised policy discourses (Ogwang, 2018). Uganda adopted its thematic curriculum for UPE in 2007, which embedded local language teaching (LLT) and child-centred pedagogy (Ogwang, 2023). Similarly, Tanzania introduced the CBC in 2005, and Kenya rolled it out in 2017 (Maiyuria et al., 2024).

Glocalisation of UPE

Decentralisation was swiftly rolled out in Uganda and Tanzania following the launch of UPE. Uganda integrated its local governments by making Local Council 5s responsible for the SFG and Capitation Grant, while authority for school management was vested in School Management Committees (SMCs) (Suzuki, 2002). Similarly, Tanzania devolved the management of its Development Fund and Capitation Grants to districts, and school management to school committees (Lindsjö, 2018; Matete, 2016). In Kenya's hybrid system, deconcentration has seen some district education officers (DEOs) acting as education ministry representatives. At the same time, some functions have been devolved to local governments, and autonomous schools are being directly funded by the central government (Grauwe & Lugaz, 2011).

Universalisation was introduced gradually in Uganda by enrolling only four (*Bana*) children per household (Kan & Klasen, 2020). However, to mobilise political support, the Museveni government declared full access for

all children in 2003 (Kabay, 2021; Kan & Klasen, 2020; Kjaer & Muwanga, 2019). Similarly, Kenya's National Rainbow Coalition party pledged UPE during the 2003 electoral campaigns (Lelei et al., 2015). Uganda's big bang approach triggered an enrolment bulge (Kabay, 2021; Ministry of Education & Sports, 2010) from approximately 3 million pupils in 1996 to over 8.9 million in 2017, culminating in 84% net enrolment by 2018 (Ogwang, 2023; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019). Kenya's enrolment also surged from 5.9 million in 2000 to 9.4 million in 2010, reaching 72% net enrolment by 2014, and Tanzania's from 4.8 million in 2001 to 8.2 million in 2013, a net enrolment of 77% (Lindsjö, 2018; Orodho, 2014; Pesha, 2016; Shukia, 2020), all with gender parity. To curb underage and overage enrolment and grade repetition, the respective governments applied the entry-age and automatic promotion policy; however, teachers reject automatic promotion as harmful to pupils (Kabay, 2021; Ogwang, 2023).

Liberalisation transformed both enrolment and the supply of inputs. In Kenya, private schooling has shot up to 50% in non-formal settlements, 36% in Uganda, and 3.5% in Tanzania (Kabay, 2021; Lindsjö, 2018; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019; Zuilkowski et al., 2018). Uganda's IMU improved the pupil–textbook ratio from 6:1 to the current 4:1, Kenya's improved from 15:1 to 3:1, and Tanzania's improved to 5:1 (Barasa et al., 2019; Lindsjö, 2018; Ogwang, 2023). In Uganda, SFGs increased the number of UPE schools from 8531 in 1996 to 13,353 in 2003, while Tanzania's DF increased the schools from roughly 12,000 in 2001 to 15,000 in 2006, coupled with a record 5000 teachers' houses (Kan & Klasen, 2020; Matete, 2016). The supply of desks and supplementary teaching materials also improved.

Teacher preparation programmes also had an impact. Uganda's TDMS increased trained teachers from 81,564 in 1996 to 145,587 in 2003 (Kan & Klasen, 2020; USAID, 2003). Similarly, Tanzania's PEDP increased trained teachers from 105,921 in 2001 to 199,705 in 2019 (Ndibalema, 2019). However, less emphasis was placed on improving teachers' remuneration (Kabay, 2021; Lindsjö, 2018; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019).

Adopting new CBCs is facing challenges in East African countries (Maiyuria et al., 2024; Ogwang, 2023). In Uganda, teachers selectively implement the thematic curriculum, which they consider heavy (Ogwang, 2023; Ssentanda & Wenske, 2021). Thus, they largely ignore continuous assessment while increasing the duration of key subjects at the expense of less important ones (Ogwang, 2023). This culminates in teaching to the test (Ogwang, 2023). The LLT is facing challenges, most especially in Uganda, due to its 21 local languages of instruction, compared to Tanzania and Kenya, which mainly use Kiswahili (Atuhurra & Kaffenberger, 2022; Kabay, 2021; Lindsjö, 2018; Sifuna, 2007). Many Ugandan local languages lack written orthographies, supportive literature, and trained teachers (Ward et al., 2006).

The respective governments' efforts moderately improved environmental conditions under UPE. Still, some parents fail to provide their children with school meals and scholastic materials due to poverty and negative attitudes (Kabay, 2021; Lindsjö, 2018; Lucumay & Matete, 2024; Wamalwa et al., 2019). Abusive punishments also remain rampant since Kenyan and Ugandan teachers, where corporal punishment is banned, are delaying the adoption of new approaches (Kalolo & Kapinga, 2023; Matofari, 2021; Ogwang, 2023).

Outcomes of the Reforms

The new partnership governance has given the EfA significant leverage over the UPE through its macro-organs like Uganda's ESCC and Tanzania's ESDC, and indirectly through its supranational sponsors like the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the World Bank. Decentralisation was given reluctant support following its implementation (Kayabwe et al., 2014; Matete, 2016; Suzuki, 2002). In Uganda, remittance of funding to local governments faces lengthy delays coupled with corruption, which undermines its effectiveness (Kayabwe et al., 2014). The Capitation Grant remains inadequate across the region (Lucumay & Matete, 2024; Pesha, 2016; Shukia, 2020).

While universalisation and liberalisation enhanced enrolment, universalisation simultaneously undermined quality due to overcrowding (Moussa & Omoeva, 2020; Mugo et al., 2015). For instance, teachers and classrooms were overwhelmed, which triggered unprecedented pupil–teacher ratios of over 70:1 in Uganda, 73:1 in Tanzania, and 60:1 in Kenya, leading to the current teaching difficulties (Kabay, 2021; Matete, 2016; Ndibalema, 2019; Ogwang, 2023; Orodho, 2014; Shukia, 2020). Recent figures still indicate inadequate textbooks, with ratios of 5:1 in Tanzania, 4:1 in Uganda, and 3:1 in Kenya (Barasa et al., 2019; Ndibalema, 2019; Ogwang, 2023). A severe shortage of desks persists in Tanzania, where some schools have less than 50% of their requirement (Lucumay & Matete, 2024; Matete, 2016). Poor learning environment undermines performance (Lindsjö, 2018; Mugo et al., 2015).

While the share of private schooling has increased, the Efa's long-term neoliberal goal of fully divesting education financing to parents remains unfulfilled (Riep, 2017; Verger et al., 2016). For instance, Uganda remains dependent on the Efa's funding for UPE, which totals USD 233 million since 2011 (GPE, n.p.; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019). Moreover, private schools, which are better-performing, are not affordable to the majority, which results in an unbalanced two-tier education system (Kabay, 2021; Lindsjö, 2018; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019).

Training did not fully address the UPE teachers' skill gaps (Matete, 2016; Ogwang, 2023). Thus, outmoded teaching styles persist in Uganda, while there is evidence of teachers' poor proficiency in English and lack of gender-sensitive pedagogies in Tanzania (Lindsjö, 2018; Ogwang, 2023). Teacher deployment also remains inadequate, especially in rural areas where some Tanzanian and Ugandan schools remain severely understaffed (Matete, 2016; Ogwang, 2023). Absenteeism also remains high as some teachers supplement their low salaries in agriculture and petty businesses (Kabay, 2021; Lindsjö, 2018).

Teachers' mediation of their CBCs also impacts UPE (Ogwang, 2023). For instance, their use of translanguaging in LLT in Uganda increases pupils' participation and comprehension, whilst increasing some lessons' duration beyond the official 30 minutes undermines holistic delivery of the curriculum (Ogwang, 2023).

Finally, child-friendly environments remain elusive under the UPE (Matete, 2016; Ogwang, 2023). Many pupils continue to go without school meals, which causes nutritional deficiencies, cognitive difficulties, increased absenteeism, and dropouts (Pesha, 2016; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019). Uganda's dropout rate reached 65% following universalisation, with 40% pupil absenteeism in 2015 in some areas (Kabay, 2021; Ogwang, 2018; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019). Thus, capable parents continue transferring their children to low-cost private schools (Lindsjö, 2018; Mugo et al., 2015; Ogwang, 2023).

Methodology

The study combined secondary document analysis with a case study in two Ugandan UPE schools and related channels. It analysed secondary documents spanning several decades of global basic education by the respective East African education ministries and sister agencies, coupled with publications by intergovernmental organs such as UNESCO, the World Bank, the Department for International Development, and USAID to explicate the reform of UPE. These data were critiqued alongside the literature and used to develop the foregoing historical contextualisation of UPE.

Fieldwork was conducted in two UPE schools in Uganda, including Somero in Central District and Kwan in Eastern District, each given a pseudonym. The schools constitute critical cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006) based on achievement data from the Uganda National Examinations Board to maximise the study's relevance. Other typical UPE features, such as rural location and LLT, were considered. The respective head teachers and class teachers for primary two, four, and six in both schools were selected to ensure a holistic interrogation of UPE reform. Other participants were chosen to represent the supra, macro, and meso layers of UPE's ecology (see

Priestley et al., 2015). A UNESCO official was selected for the supra layer (did not respond to the study request). A senior Uganda Ministry of Education official was chosen for the macro layer. At the same time, the DEOs and Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) of the Central and Eastern Districts, where the schools are located, were selected for the meso layer. Finally, each school's SMC parent representative and Centre Coordinating Tutor (CCT) were selected. In total, 18 participants were selected.

Fieldwork was conducted in two phases using semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. In phase one, the researcher interviewed each participant (minus the ministry official), emphasising contextual data aligned with the UPE reforms. Observation, photography, and note-taking were used. Primary documents, including circulars, staff rolls, and reports, were collected to construct a comprehensive picture of the reform contexts. A preliminary data review was done, which enabled the interview guides to be refined for phase two. Each participant (including the ministry official) was reinterviewed in phase two. In all, 26 interviews were conducted.

Ethical approval was received from my institution's research ethics committee, and the study was conducted per the British Educational Research Association's (2011) ethical guidelines. Some of the data were sensitive as they reflected the participants' views about government policies and UPE's ecology; thus, confidentiality of the data was ensured. The anonymity of the participants and sites was assured by adopting pseudonyms and omitting identifiers during the study and in this chapter.

The data were analysed using a qualitative thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved initial coding to identify the key themes in the reform of the UPE. The themes were then refined during focused coding and described in the findings section, accompanied by quotations.

The Schools

Somero Primary School is located in Central Uganda, where the Baganda ethnic group live. Its surroundings are a low-income peri-urban area which thrives mainly on subsistence farming and petty trade. Somero has several neighbouring UPE and private primary schools. Its large classrooms, well-stocked with desks, can hold over 50 pupils each. It lacks a primary three (P3) classroom due to a lack of land; thus, P3 lessons are conducted in the adjacent Catholic chapel. Somero has only one office reserved for the head teacher. It also lacked staff accommodation and a staffroom; consequently, staff meetings and lunch occur during recess in the P5 classroom. Management authority lies with its SMC, while the head teacher handles daily administration. It had nine qualified teachers and one unqualified teacher, seven of whom were class teachers. It performs best in science and English, and it has improved after abandoning LLT. Somero's pupil absenteeism is estimated at 30%, which is attributed to parents engaging their children in domestic chores, farming, and petty trade. Most Somero pupils appeared young for their enrolled grade, which implied possible underage enrolment.

Kwan is located in the Eastern District, home to the Sabiny. It is a rural community with low incomes mainly derived from subsistence farming and cattle keeping. Like Somero, it has several neighbouring UPE and private primary schools. Kwan's classrooms are large and well-stocked with desks for between 100 and 200 pupils. Like Somero, it lacks a staffroom and accommodation and has only one office. Kwan is managed under the UPE's generic administrative system. It had 12 teachers instead of the allotted 16, seven of whom were class teachers, while the remaining five were subject teachers. Kwan's PLE performance corresponds with Somero's despite being among the best in the Eastern District due to the high regional disparity. Its performance in English remains fair, despite its continued adherence to LLT.

Findings: Ongoing Glocalisation in Uganda

The District Education Departments (DEDs) remain under-resourced. The ministry provides limited funding for meetings with DEOs, leading to frequent absences. The inspections grant covers only one visit per school, per term. The DEDs had just four (Central) and five (Eastern) staff, covering 60 and 90 schools, respectively. Consequently, they reinforced their inspectorate teams using associate assessors of selected teachers and CCTs. They lacked transport for schools' inspection, which renders inspections relatively ineffective.

The UPE enrolment remains overwhelming, especially in rural areas. Kwan's enrolment was over 800 pupils, down from roughly 1,200 following the construction of new neighbouring schools. Its pupil–teacher ratio and pupil–classroom ratio were approximately 66:1 and 117:1, respectively. However, its daily pupil attendance fluctuates due to high absenteeism. P6 was the most congested, where over 70 pupils were observed in a lesson. Somero's student population was under 250 pupils, far below the Central District's average projected catchment of 470 pupils. Its pupil–teacher and pupil–classroom ratios stood at 24:1 and 30:1 respectively, implying under-enrolment, like most neighbouring peri-urban UPE schools, attributed to the 'mushrooming' of private schools. In both Somero and Kwan, the inadequate infrastructure compels teachers to deliver lessons or hold staff activities in alternate spaces and at alternate times.

Using automatic promotion to control enrolment lacked staff acceptance in both schools and was not consistently practised. Kwan's head teacher observed, 'If you now keep on promoting, of course, you are making that one go and fall out'. Similarly, David, a teacher from Somero, noted that, 'You cannot promote a child who cannot even read and write. . . . And what we do these days, we at least adjust on the policies of the government'. The teachers, therefore, make a pupil repeat the grade in case of poor performance. They also ignore the entry age, following the cue of their parents. It could be inferred that Somero was exploiting this loophole to increase its enrolment, which the government monitors using league tables.

Private primary schools were spreading rapidly near Somero and Kwan, comprising roughly 150 to 250 pupils each. While most are locally owned, the transnational giant Bridge International Academies has also entered the market (see Riep, 2017). They were gaining enrolment at the expense of the UPE schools due to exclusive English instruction coupled with low tuition fees. The government ignores their violation of the LLT, which it enforces under the UPE. Therefore, many parents, including the UPE teachers, transfer their children there, while children from poorer homes attend the UPE. Some schools, like Somero, had thus covertly abandoned LLT to regain enrolment.

Instructional materials remain inadequate. Somero's and Kwan's textbook ratios stood at 5:1 and 6:1, respectively. The GPE had invested in instructional materials in the Central District, targeting a pupil–textbook ratio of 3:1 for P4 to P7. It had achieved a ratio of 1:1 in its intervention areas. However, curriculum guides remain inadequate, having never been replaced. Kwan's CCT explained that 'all those books are torn up. They cannot be used again, and the ministry has never given us'.

A pervasive shortage of qualified teachers persists. The Eastern District had a shortfall of over 150 teachers, while Karamoja lacked local language teachers. Many teachers use lay knowledge in the LLT due to gaps in pre-service training (see Ogwang, 2023). This skills gap was being addressed through a GPE-funded curriculum review. The Eastern District's CCT criticised the under-resourced and haphazard training programmes, which leave many teachers unskilled. He observed that in the local language training,

teachers did not have material [i]n mother tongue. We were using English texts to teach them mother tongue teaching. . . . So, we were handling English items, translate into mother tongue, then we teach them.

The unsupportive school environments also constrain policy uptake. A CCT explained that,

in a staff of twenty, you train three people to go and implement change. The other seventeen will say, 'but you people, what are you coming to do'. So the environment in the school will not promote it.

The CCTs noted that more emphasis was placed on training P1 teachers and teachers in general, and less on their first-line supervisors, the head teachers and deputies.

Policy training is being incorporated into primary teacher colleges' curricula. The Central District CCT supported it 'because it is a challenge for a teacher to come out and find that the situation is different from the training he has received'. The CCTs provide continuous professional training through in-service outreach. Each CCT covers many schools, limiting their visits (see USAID, 2003).

The LLT remains unpopular among both parents and teachers. Parents consider it a setback since it is not examinable, while teachers oppose it mainly because they lack competence. According to the Central District's CCT, 'those who were not well-grounded in the mother-tongue itself, they also find themselves in a dilemma. . . . So, those who are of that challenge they are not more receptive'. Conversely, urban and peri-urban teachers resist LLT primarily due to competition with private schools, which teach exclusively in English and therefore poach their pupils.

Parents' mandatory contribution towards school feeding, uniforms and scholastic materials remains inconsistent. Eastern District's DEO noted, 'if you go to a school, a halfway [sic] may be eating. Most of them don't eat. Parents don't contribute'. The RDC was more positive:

Most of the schools now have gardens where they are cultivating maize and beans . . . for the children. Some of them ask the parents to contribute every term to feed the children. Some of them contribute in kind, some contribute in cash.

The parents' inconsistency mainly stems from poverty and the non-enforcement of the policy. Parents who can only afford one meal a day prefer to provide it at home, while others insist that the government should provide everything since the UPE is a free system.

Corporal punishment remains rampant. While more teachers are adapting alternative disciplinary approaches like counselling due to sensitisation, pupils' inadequate life skills are a stumbling block. Central District's CCT noted that some teachers don't see these alternative measures working out, 'because we have not helped our children to develop life-skills like critical thinking, self-awareness'. Thus, the Eastern District's CCT supported corporal punishment,

you know the stick will do much of the work; creating order, a stick, making sure children come to school, a stick, the father wants to send his child to go and collect water, he says no, 'I will be caned when I go late'. So, a stick will create a very good standard for these children.

Somero's and Kwan's teachers practised corporal punishment with parents' consent since they collectively believe it may motivate pupils to work harder.

Discussion

Decentralising key UPE mechanisms to local governments was one of EfA's prerequisites for service improvement. Ball's (2017) neoliberal globalisation framework highlights it under the choice and voice policy technology through empowering service users. Enactment varied across the three East African countries, with Tanzania and Uganda approaching it more comprehensively, while Kenya mostly limited itself to finance (Grauwe & Lugaz, 2011; Kayabwe et al., 2014; Matete, 2016). However, decentralisation has achieved superficial success, such as incorporating its mechanisms (e.g., Uganda's SFG and Tanzania's DF). At the same time, its main goals, such as increased efficiency and lower costs, remain obstructed by bureaucracy and corruption (Kayabwe et al., 2014; Matete, 2016). Using Ball et al.'s (2011) enactment framework to interrogate Uganda's empirical data may help illuminate this scenario. The misalignment between UPE's external contexts (both central and local government) and its material context manifests as the primary source of decentralisation's funding challenges, mainly arising from the government's inadequate allocations and bureaucracy. This goes back to the launch of UPE (see Ward et al., 2006). However, UPE's inadequate funding also arises from the situated context; for instance, the Eastern District's wider rural area and more schools also lead to higher costs.

Attaining universal enrolment by 2015 was the primary goal of globalisation enshrined in Millennium Development Goal 2 (Lindsjö, 2018; Moussa & Omoeva, 2020). The EfA approached it using its choice and voice policy technology, which targeted universalisation and its competition and contestability, aiming at liberalisation (Ball, 2017). Despite these commonalities, the three East African countries approached the reforms with variations, such as Uganda and Kenya's politicisation of the UPE's launch, Uganda's phased universalisation, and Tanzania's de-emphasis of liberalisation (Kjaer & Muwanga, 2019; Lelei et al., 2015; Lindsjö, 2018). Ultimately, they achieved tremendous enrolment, particularly in gross numbers rather than net. Applying Ball et al.'s (2011) enactment theory to Uganda's empirical data may help to elucidate this. Uganda's ministry official noted its context of high fertility, which produces over one million new school entrants every year who flood rural schools like Kwan. The resulting poor material context of insufficient infrastructure and other adverse situated factors like high rural poverty and child labour subsequently lead to high absenteeism and dropouts, reducing net UPE enrolment. Professional cultures are also implicated, as reflected in the abnormally high enrolment in P6 since teachers compel weak pupils to repeat to pass the PLE in P7 (Kabay, 2021; Ogwang, 2023). Conversely, Somero, a peri-urban school, had less than 60% enrolment owing to parents' wider choices in its locale, including private schools, which popularly provide only English instruction. Therefore, such situated and professional factors favour private schools while causing a decline in the UPE enrolment.

To enhance quality, EfA prioritised infrastructure, instructional materials, and facilities reform (Kabay, 2021; Lucumay & Matete, 2024; Orodho, 2014). Ball (2017) identifies it under the competition and contestability policy technology, which was pursued through flexible contracting and outsourcing. The EfA subsequently mandated infrastructure construction strictly via competitive bidding (see Ball, 2017). All three East African countries have complied. Kenya has done so at the macro level through its education ministry.

Meanwhile, Tanzania and Uganda have devolved the role to their local government SFG and DF, respectively. Uganda successfully constructed roughly 5000 schools between 1996 and 2003 (Kan & Klasen, 2020). However, a shortage of schools/classrooms persists, as reflected in Uganda's high pupil-to-classroom ratio of 63:1 (Tromp & Datzberger, 2019). Using Ball et al.'s (2011) enactment theory to frame Uganda's empirical data may help clarify this paradox. As noted earlier, Uganda's situated context of high fertility produces over one million new school entrants every year, thus perpetuating school overcrowding. The UPE's material and external contexts are also implicated, arising from inadequate national and local government budgets, which limit school and classroom construction. This leads to high congestion, especially in rural schools like Kwan. Conversely, Somero lacked a classroom for P3 due to land shortages in the Central District.

The Efa also sought quality improvement by enhancing the supply of instructional materials. It vested this role in the respective countries' education ministries. Ultimately, all three East African countries improved pupil-to-textbook ratios (Barasa et al., 2019; Ndibalema, 2019; Ogwang, 2023). However, the ratios remain far from ideal, as corroborated by Uganda's fieldwork data. In this regard, Ball et al.'s (2011) enactment framework implicates Uganda's material context, particularly insufficient funding coupled with the short life span of textbooks. The situated context is also involved, as Kwan's higher student enrolment causes higher ratios.

Another Efa quality imperative was streamlining teacher preparation and motivation to achieve higher numbers and skill (Kan & Klasen, 2020; Ndibalema, 2019). Ball's (2017) model explains it under the strengthening of teachers' capability and capacity policy technology. To that end, the East African countries launched massive training programmes like the PEDP in Tanzania and the TDMS in Uganda, which were significant successes (Kan & Klasen, 2020; Pasha, 2016). However, a substantial shortage of trained teachers persists, coupled with deployment gaps and poor pedagogical skills, which Uganda's empirical data strongly corroborate.

When interrogated within Ball et al.'s (2011) enactment framework, the data still pinpoint the material context or insufficient funding as the leading cause of teacher shortages. The situated and external contexts are also highlighted in the unbalanced teacher allocations between the rural Eastern District and the more urbanised Central District due to local government deployment practices and teachers' reluctance to teach in rural areas. Finally, the professional context is responsible for teachers' poor receptiveness to new policies and inadequate skills resulting from under-resourced and haphazard training programmes (Ogwang, 2023).

The Efa promoted the CBC and its use of participatory pedagogies (Maiyuria et al., 2024; Ogwang, 2023). Ball (2017) identifies it under the choice and voice and top-down performance management policy technologies, which sought to enhance learning audit through performativity (Ogwang, 2018). Consequently, all three East African countries adopted the CBC in one form or another, embedded with the LLT and child-centred pedagogy (Lindsjö, 2018; Tromp & Datzberger, 2019). The LLT's progress has been turbulent, marked by teachers' inadequate skills and resistance, especially in Uganda (Ogwang, 2023). This dilemma persists, as seen in Uganda's empirical data. Ball et al.'s (2011) enactment theory may help to elucidate this. The continued resistance of parents and teachers to the LLT points fingers at Uganda's situated context in that Ugandans generally prefer English instruction since it is an international language (Ogwang, 2023). Professional factors are also at play since the teachers' opposition partially arises from their inadequate skills.

Finally, school environmental reform was pursued under globalisation (Ogwang, 2023). Ball (2017) captures it under the Efa's choice and voice policy technology. It sought local community involvement in, among other areas, improving nutrition and curbing abuse in schools. All three East African countries subsequently passed policies maintaining parents' responsibility for school meals, while Uganda and Kenya banned corporal punishment. However, many parents are still failing to provide school meals for their children, while abusive punishments remain rampant across the region. Uganda's empirical data corroborated this. When the data are interrogated using Ball et al.'s (2011) enactment framework, the situated context emerges as the primary cause of parents' inconsistent provision of school meals, arising from Uganda's high poverty levels, coupled with parents' negative attitudes. The situated and professional contexts are also implicated through the parents' and teachers' wilful perpetuation of corporal punishment.

Conclusion

Ball's globalisation theory and Ball and colleagues' enactment theory have enriched this analysis of the UPE reform, and it could still benefit from critique. With this caveat, the study offers the following conclusions.

The EfA has been quite systematic in its globalisation program in policy and practice towards standardising basic education along neoliberal lines. Its blueprints, such as UNESCO and World Bank reports, are glaring in this regard. The EfA's subsequent rollout of UPE emphasising strategies such as performativity, universalisation, liberalisation, and reprofessionalising teachers, among other areas, underscores its systematic approach. Globalisation ensued as a very complex process that varied across different settings owing to resource dynamics, timing, and politics, such that many strategies were modified even before enactment commenced.

Glocalisation, which involves policy interpretation, translation, and practice by local stakeholders, was even more complex, creating more circumstances for hybridity than standardisation. Focusing on practice, where this study concentrated, it is clear that contextual imperatives frequently prevailed over the EfA's vision. For example, both Kenya and Uganda launched the UPE as campaign promises. Consequently, Uganda abandoned its gradual universalisation, as agreed with the EfA, and declared full access to mobilise political support. This resulted in overwhelming gross rather than net enrolment. Similarly, decentralisation was fully applied in Tanzania and Uganda, while Kenya adopted a hybrid approach. Meanwhile, its goals remain compromised by bureaucracy and corruption. Glocalisation has therefore been enacted with variation owing to contextual imperatives, leading to a proliferation of hybridity and mainly first-order changes.

Finally, Ball and colleagues' enactment framework identifies the main contextual impediments during enactment. In most cases, such as decentralisation, quality reform, and teacher preparation, the material context or insufficient funding was primarily implicated. This implies that Uganda must financially invest more in these areas to achieve better outcomes. The situated context was also involved due to Uganda's high fertility rate, language attitudes, poverty, land shortages, and parents' negative attitudes, which implementers must confront to improve enactment.

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Notes

Notes

- 1 Education league tables are published rankings of schools in order of performance based on metrics such as student test scores, graduation rates, etc.