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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COMMERCIALIZATION OF EDUCATION IN UGANDA; CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

Commercialisation of education is an international phenomenon that is evident in many parts of the world. The provision of education is fast moving from being the responsibility of government to that of commercial individuals and organisations. In Uganda, commercialisation of education is attributed to the fact that government has largely abdicated its responsibility of providing education to the private sector. Commercialisation of education has had dire consequences by promoting inefficiency due to focusing on the profit motive rather than the ideals of the noble purpose of education.

Key words:

Commercialisation, Education,
Uganda, Causes and
Consequences of
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INTRODUCTION

The Concept and Purpose of Education

Education may be defined as the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life; Dictionary.com (2015). Farooq (2012) suggests that education is a process in which and by which the knowledge, characters and behaviour of human beings are shaped and moulded.

The purpose of education, according to Dewey (1934), has always been to give the young the things they need in order to develop in an orderly, sequential way into useful members of society. Meanwhile, Martin Luther King Jr (1948) opined that the function of education is to teach one to think intensively and critically. He however argued that education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society because the most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason but no morals. According to Fooshay (1991), the continuing purpose of education, since ancient times, has been to bring people to as full a realisation as possible of what it is to be human being. He further argues that education is meant to develop the intellect to serve social needs, to contribute to the economy, to create an effective workforce, to prepare students for a job or a career and to promote a particular social or political system.

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), it is stated that everyone has a right to education and that education shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. It is also stated that technical and professional education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. To underscore the importance of education, world leaders in 2000 adopted as goal number 2 among the Millennium Development Goals a target to achieve universal primary education for all by the year 2015; Millennium Project (2006).

Commercialisation of Education across the World

Although it can be argued that education is for the common good and its cost should be borne by the government for the common benefit of society, the trend all over the world is that it has been increasingly commercialised in recent times. In China for instance, according to Tao, Berci & Wayne (2015), commercialisation of education has been a fairly recent trend in China which has manifested itself in mushrooming private schools at different levels. The authors argue that commercialisation of education is running against the cultural tradition where education was not for profit and was designed to create opportunities for upward social mobility for those who aspire. However, according to the authors, the current commercialised education seems to be money oriented and may block opportunities for many poor people.

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Similarly, [Kuehn \(2003\)](#) argues that while education is expected to be funded by government and accessible to all, there are increasing cases of commercialisation in the American education system which has led to a situation where only those who can afford to pay to access education. [Schrum \(2002\)](#) argues that commercialisation in education in the United States of America has been influenced by the perceived reduction in the funding of educational institutions in a time of rising costs and expectations. This has led to schools being asked to find their own funding which has turned school administrators into fundraisers. Another aspect of commercialisation is the involvement of business corporations which have invaded schools with advertising schemes disguised as funding for the schools in the form of advertising in schools buses, sponsorship of school sports activities etc.

Writing about commercialisation of education in India, [Tejawasi\(2010\)](#), argues that education was always something that was driven by devotion and thought, a situation that has changed with the advent of commercialisation. He argues that the current commercial education system manufactures solipsists but does not nurture altruists and as a result India has become a dirt pool where educational institutions proliferate like mushrooms many of which have become clubs for incompetent youngsters. It is also argued that the commercialised brand of education has affected the teaching profession by making people to view the profession as just another job which pays and feeds them. Consequently, many leaders have developed indifference towards their jobs juxtaposed with demands of money-mongering institutions that they work in.

[Shyam Sahu \(2013\)](#) argues that education, as provided for in various constitutions and international conventions is supposed to be a fundamental human right that should be the responsibility of government. However, in many parts of the world, government's share in overall education expenditure has gone down drastically. In India for example, government expenditure which was 80% in 1983 had gone down to 67% in 1999 and currently stands at 54%. At the same time, private expenditure has increased by 11 times in the last 15 years and commercialisation of education has led to the sale of the education services with a profit motive at the expense of quality.

On the effect of commercialisation of education in India, [Bhatia \(2014\)](#) notes that during the 90s, there were only handful students who scored more than 90% but today the situation has reversed and there are only a handful that score less than 90%. This is because education has become a commodity and all genres of society are overly obsessed with high scores which has devalued the real essence of education. This has been as a result of over-supply of education which has led to substandard education and very limited job opportunities. Similarly, [Mishra \(2012\)](#) observes that students in the commercialised education system in India have been reduced to mere consumers, leaving out the millions of poor yet deserving students. The trend means that education is no longer a noble profession but a business enterprise and profit making opportunity where subjects such as Science and Mathematics assume more importance than literature or Art merely because

they provide more remunerative jobs in the market. As a result, subjects and their importance is often market driven and not necessarily for the development of the child's potential. Teachers are no longer important in decision making and advocating the best interest of the child but rather they are expected to follow the line and work for the best interest of the enterprise represented by the sponsors, trustees and managers/school owners.

Regarding the situation in Nigeria, [Les-Leba \(2014\)](#) notes that private investment in education will generally be driven by profit motive and if youth education is left solely in the hands of entrepreneurs, the basic right to education may only be available to the small elite class who can afford it while the majority of citizens who are financially challenged will remain uneducated and become social liabilities who may who may even retard wealth creation.

Meanwhile, [Chijioko \(2014\)](#) reported that a Gambian Minister, while acknowledging the contribution of the private sector to education, had decried the commercialisation of higher education in Africa which he said was bound to compromise quality and deny the less privileged people access to higher education.

Evolution of Commercialisation of Education in Uganda

Located in the heart of East Africa, the Republic of Uganda is a land locked nation that straddles the equator and shares a boarder with Kenya to the east, Tanzania and Rwanda to the south, South Sudan to the north and Democratic Republic of Congo to the west. Prior to colonisation by the British between 1894 to 1961, education in Uganda was informal and was offered through a system of enculturation where each ethnic group trained its young men and women to become acceptable and responsible adults in their communities. With the advent of colonisation came western education that was initially introduced by the missionaries in.

According to [Ssemutoke \(2012\)](#), Kabaka Mutesa I is lauded as the major force that helped western civilisation and education to take root in Uganda when he invited the British missionaries to come to Uganda in 1875. This triggered the first expedition of Anglican missionaries who arrived in 1877 who were followed by Roman Catholic missionaries in 1879. The missionaries were responsible for curriculum development, implementation, and examinations. They were also responsible for the building and administration of schools and training of teachers.

According to [Countrystudies \(2014\)](#), mission schools in Uganda were first established in the 1890s and the first government secondary school was established in 1924. By 1950, the government operated only 3 of the 53 secondary schools in the country. 47 of these schools were operated by religious organisations while 3 were operated by other private operators. The main objective of the missionaries was to train a crop of elite native cadres that would be used to capture more converts.

The British colonial office initially feared that educating Africans might create unfulfillable aspirations by making Africans believe that they were equal to Europeans yet the colonial system was determined to deny Africans access to equality. As a result, the British colonial office did not begin building and controlling schools until around 1927. To date, ownership of most schools has remained in the hands of religious groups and lately private individuals, despite the creation of a government Ministry of Education. After independence in 1962, the first government tried to support schools in order to promote access to education. However, when Idi Amin took over government in 1971, education took a nosedive. Not being educated himself, Idi Amin feared that educated Ugandans despised him and would undermine him and not much was invested in education by his government and those that followed.

The current government which took power in 1986 has initiated a boom in education characterised by liberalisation which has led to proliferation of education institutions ranging from nursery schools to universities. The government has also introduced Universal Primary Education and Universal Post Primary Education. Brans (2004) observes that after introduction of Universal Secondary education, the government realised that there was a shortage of government schools and resorted to partnering with private schools.

The current education system in Uganda comprises of the Pre-Primary, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary and University levels. At all these levels, the government policy of liberalisation has promoted privatisation and commercialisation of education. To date, the number of privately owned educational institutions outweighs that of government or government-aided institutions at all levels. Even in the few government or government aided institutions, the biggest part of the budget is financed by parents associations who run the schools privately.

Baine (2010), points out that since 1988 when the first private university was opened in Uganda, the winds of change have swept Uganda's higher education sector to change how it is financed and managed. The shift has been from the state as the sole player to fully private universities operated as commercial enterprises alongside state-owned ones. Even the institutions that are being run by the state are being run on the basis of free market principles and the majority of the students are privately sponsored.

According to Uganda's Ministry of Education (2011), out of a total of 16684 primary schools, 12075 (72%) are government aided while 4609 are purely privately owned and funded. It must be noted however that even in the government aided schools, more than 70% of the budget is privately funded by parents. Out of 2564 secondary schools, 1004 (39%) are government aided while 1560 (61%) are purely privately owned. Out of 189 post primary tertiary institutions, 93 (49%) are government aided while 51% are purely private. Meanwhile, out of the 164 post secondary tertiary institutions, 115 (70%) are privately owned.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher conducted a survey where the opinions of various categories of educationists and stakeholders in the western district of Bushenyi were sought regarding the causes and consequences of commercialisation of education. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, head teachers, education officers, parents and students in various parts of the district. The responses were qualitatively analysed to capture the predominant views and draw conclusions about the causes and consequences of commercialisation of education in the district and the nation of Uganda at large.

Causes of Commercialisation of Education in Uganda

According to findings from literature and the survey, commercialization of education in Uganda has been exacerbated by liberalisation and privatisation of educational institutions which was occasioned by the failure of the Government of Uganda to adequately fund public education (UN Committee; 2014). According to UNICEF (2013), public spending as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product allocated to education in Uganda was a paltry 3.2%. Over 90% of the respondents reached in the survey concurred with this view and opined that the private sector had moved in to fill the gap and provide education to the millions who would have been left out if there were no private schools. It must be reiterated that the survey established that even in the public educational institutions, there was a system of cost sharing where parents privately fund the bulk of the school budget.

Another cause of commercialization of education cited by most respondents was the deliberate government policy of liberalisation which opened the doors to the private sector to establish educational institutions. Many respondents pointed out that while there were provisions on paper in the law about regulation of private educational institutions, the reality was that in practice such provisions were not strictly followed. The result is that many schools are started and run with a profit motive and the educational motive is only incidental and secondary.

The other cause of commercialisation of education is the failure of government to employ the numerous teachers being graduated by various teacher training institutions across the country. Most respondents pointed out that for many years now, government of Uganda had suspended recruitment of teachers, citing lack of funds. This has created a large pool of teachers who are unemployed. Some of these teachers have gone ahead to start their own private schools which they run commercially while others have continued to feed the many private schools located everywhere across the country.

Another prominent cause of commercialisation of education in Uganda that was cited by the majority of respondents was the competition for prominence by not only the private schools but also the public schools. It was mentioned by many respondents that schools and even Universities compete for prominence in order to attract media attention and enrolment which directly translates into pecuniary benefits for the school owners or managers.

Lack of supervision and regulation was also cited as another contributing factor to commercialisation of education in Uganda. It was noted by many respondents that government supervisors are thin on the ground and poorly motivated. This means that it is possible for private proprietors to start schools in order to make a quick buck without being stopped or supervised by anybody. This is made worse by lack of information by the members of the public who have no idea about which schools are registered and recognised by government.

Another cause of commercialisation of education cited by many respondents was the low literacy and education levels of the population. This means that many of the parents are gullible and easily taken advantage of by the school proprietors and managers. Many have no idea of what the fees they pay is spent on and what the priorities of a school should be. As a result, schools continue to charge huge amounts of fees and to rip off the unsuspecting parents.

Corruption among school owners and managers was also cited as a major contributing factor to commercialisation of education. It was mentioned that most of the expenditure was inflated in order to cater for kickbacks for the school managers. This results in school charges that are higher than they should be. As a result, parents end up spending more on the education of their children than they should.

Another cause of commercialisation of education in Uganda is ostentatious spending by parents. Many parents are attracted to expensive schools in order to show off to their peers that they can afford these schools. Some of the parents even borrow money at high interest rates just to sustain their status as people who can afford the expensive schools. The school managers on their part take advantage of this folly and continue to exploit the parents to enrich themselves.

Consequences of Commercialisation of Education in Uganda

The majority of respondents reached blamed commercialisation of education for the sprawling proliferation of private educational institutions at all levels in the country. While this has been in part due to the increasing demand for education which the public educational institutions are not capable of satisfying, it has resulted into poor standards in many respects. Most of the institutions lack capacity to serve their clients and are characterised by insufficient infrastructure, insufficient and poorly qualified human resource and poor management systems. In most of the institutions, remuneration for workers is poor thereby affecting efficiency, professionalism and productivity. The result of all this is exploitation of parents who end up paying for less than what they deserve and a society that is founded on questionable values.

These findings are in agreement with [Kukunda \(2002\)](#) who argued that increased withdrawal of government's commitment from education has led to a deterioration of service delivery. Similarly, [Ssempebwa \(2009\)](#) noted that two decades after the liberalisation of higher education in Uganda, educationists are still faced with the dilemma of declining levels of quality assurance despite widespread propositions associating

liberalisation with quality assurance. No wonder, literacy rates are still low at only 78.2% according to Unicef (2013).

Most of the respondents interviewed cited the ever increasing cost of education and therefore the burden on parents as one of the consequences of commercialised education in Uganda. It was pointed out that the ever increasing cost of education means that the less privileged are left out or forced to drop out of school or they have to resort to the less prominent schools where their chances of passing or getting recognition are minimised. This promotes income inequality as it directly impinges on the career and employment opportunities of graduates of the schools of different grades.

Commercialisation of education is also said to have led to undue emphasis on academics in education at the expense of other domains such as the affective and the psycho-motor domains. This is because of the government and media which tend to give prominence to performance in public examinations when grading schools. As a result, schools have neglected all other areas that are of a co-curricular nature. The result of this is that schools and universities are producing graduates with super grades who can hardly perform or be responsible citizens. Commercialisation of education is also said to have led to overcrowding in the schools. Most schools have no limit on how many students they can take in because the more the students, the more the money. This means that there is pressure on the facilities in the schools and many students are denied the opportunity to get individual attention from teachers. According to [Rugumayo \(2009\)](#), commercialisation has resulted in greed for money resulting in head teachers stealing school money, university students sleeping with their students for grades and money and students smoking, taking illicit drugs and burning down their own schools.

As a result of the inefficiency in schools occasioned by over-commercialisation, many students end up with bad grades when they could have done better. Overcrowding in the schools also exposes students to health and other risks. In many schools, students end up as juvenile delinquents and are hooked to drugs and never get known or attended to due to the low teacher-student ratio.

In a bid to attract students so as to earn more from them, many schools are said to be spending money on non-priorities such as school buses for boarding schools and expensive recreational facilities such as swimming pools and fancy buildings. This further increases the cost burden on the parents and robs them of income funds that that would have otherwise been invested to create more wealth for the family and the nation at large.

Another trend that has emerged and spread like wildfire as a result of commercialisation is the notion of school visitation days. Every school has such a day in the course of the term where parents come to school to visit the children. While the ideal objective of this arrangement is to give parents an opportunity to check on the progress of the children, the practice is that visiting days have been turned into days where parents show off their family's financial might by way of the expensive goodies that they bring for their children. The result of this is that children from low income families are either

stigmatised because their parents cannot afford expensive goodies or the parents are forced to spend beyond their means in order to match the competition. Overall, the result is increased spending on education by all parents.

Commercialisation of education has made the running of schools a profit making venture not only in the private schools but also in the government aided schools where parents contribute the biggest part of the budget. This means that schools are always trying to find ways of attracting as many fees paying students as possible. One of the surest ways of attracting enrolment is to ensure good performance especially in final public examinations whose results are usually published in the media. Thus it is the dream of every school manager to have as many of the students passing with flying colours as possible because this translates into the number of students that will be interested in joining the school hoping to pass as well. The competition to get good grades has led to many unethical practices including examination malpractices. Such malpractices range from cheating examinations to bribing examiners. Teaching methods have also been modelled towards coaching students to pass examinations rather than helping them to learn.

In a bid to create an impression that a particular school is good, some schools resort to giving students good grades even when they do not deserve the simply for the sake of convincing parents that the school is good. Others resort to persuasive advertising in the media where they purport to have certain facilities in the school even when they do not have them. In many schools, children who perform averagely are denied opportunity to be promoted or are relegated to sit their final examinations in other centres to create an impression there were no poor or average performers in the good school.

Another common practice as a result of commercialisation of education is that school managers shop for good students and offer them bursaries and gifts to encourage them to choose or stay in their schools so as to post excellent results in the final public examinations. The result of this is that parents of the not-so-bright students are made to bear the burden of meeting the cost of the education of their children and that of the bright students.

Commercialisation of education has promoted rivalry among schools as the cut-throat competition for students and the accruing financial benefits becomes stiffer. This has resulted into some ugly scenes like school fires and other forms of sabotage which are sometimes believed to be initiated by some school managers in order to discredit their rivals so as to attract more students to their own schools.

Due to commercialisation, many schools end up compromising on common values like discipline of students. Following the notion that the customer is the king, in many schools the rules and regulations are not followed to the letter because school managers fear to antagonise the students who may choose to join other schools. As a result, in many of the schools discipline has gone to the dogs. In many others, riots are the order of the day as students pile pressure on the school managers sometimes making unrealistic demands. Eventually,

many schools are forced to play to the demands of the juvenile delinquents in the schools at the expense of the virtues and values should be guiding them.

Even in the universities and tertiary institutions, commercialisation has reared its ugly head. Many universities take on many more students than they can handle just to make money. Many of the universities do not have enough facilities and human resource expertise to sufficiently serve the number of students enrolled but they keep enrolling more so as to rake in the badly needed fees. Many of these universities start courses with fancy names just to attract the unsuspecting students when the content taught in such courses may not be different from that of the traditional courses. Students are also passed with high class degrees but often times the performance of such students in the world of work is found wanting. This has resulted in many graduates remaining unemployed or unemployable because what their academic transcripts portray is not what they are worth or capable of in reality. This finding is in agreement with [Ssekamwa and Lugumba \(2001\)](#) who pointed out that policies in Uganda's education system have brought out significant progress within the limits of available resources but there is a new challenge of unemployed school graduates.

CONCLUSION

Findings from the survey and the literature show that the education system in Uganda is heavily commercialised. The majority of educational institutions at all levels are privately owned and operated with a profit motive. Even the few government owned or government aided institutions are run commercially because government contribution to the budget is very small and the rest of the budget is privately funded by parents.

While commercialisation of education in Uganda has made education more accessible, it has had more negative effects than the positive ones. There is need for strict control and regulation of the sector to avoid further deterioration of the already bad situation. As recommended by [Rugumayo \(2009\)](#), probably there is need for government to resume its role as the principal provider of education at all levels and not abandon the system to the unrelenting harshness and whims of market forces.

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