‘School was nothing but a taboo for me’ concludes Johannah, a young South African, after recounting her life story. Johannah is one of the early school leavers who features in this book. Figures on participation in education in Africa show that despite government agreements and policies developed under the banner of Education for All this remains a remote goal. In several countries, programmes on Universal Primary Education have improved access to education, but do those who enter school remain there until they have reached a suitable level? Do they acquire enough competences at primary and secondary school to survive the tough daily life in sub-Saharan countries? What happens to children and young adults who leave school early? What measures can be taken to prevent them from doing so?

This book is based on research carried out in Eastern and Southern Africa by scholars from Africa and the Netherlands who cooperated within the framework of the ESLA project. The contributions to this book reflect the exchanges and discussions which took place in this research group, initiated by staff of Mzumbe University in Tanzania, Uganda Martyrs University and the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. The group aims to go beyond figures and uncover the causes, effects and stories of the young people involved, as well as explore promising new strategies with which to address their needs. As early school leaving is not exclusively an African problem, a contribution on the Dutch situation is also included.

The book concludes that exclusion from education has far-reaching effects, not only for the young people involved, but also for the society in which they live. The burden of educational exclusion should be the joint responsibility of developing and developed countries. The authors hope the book will contribute not only to a greater understanding of the phenomenon of early school leaving, but also challenge it in terms of developing policies and programmes that can prevent educational exclusion and support those who already find themselves in such a situation.
The Burden of Educational Exclusion
The Burden of Educational Exclusion

Understanding and Challenging Early School Leaving in Africa

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors are very grateful to the following people and organizations, all of whom made the preparation of the content and ultimately the publication of this book for the Early School Leaving in Africa (ESLA) project possible.

First of all we would like to thank the administration and staff of Uganda Martyrs University in Nkozi, Uganda and Mzumbe University in Morogoro, Tanzania for their effective and enthusiastic support of the research activities and workshops, all of which were very important in relation to the eventual completion of this book. In addition we would like to thank the staff of the office for international relations of the University of Groningen for their administrative and organizational support throughout the project.

An essential contribution to this book comes from Master’s students from both the North and the South who, sometimes under difficult conditions, prepared the ground for the ESLA project. The editors would like to thank them for their dedication and perseverance.

The involvement, right from the beginning, of teachers, learners, early school leavers, parents, NGO practitioners and staff from education departments in Tanzania and Uganda has been crucial in ensuring the relevance of the ESLA project and its concern for implementation. We look forward to continuing and strengthening our partnership.

We are also grateful to NUFFIC, the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education, for their financial support. In the last phase of the project we also welcomed the support of the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation in the Netherlands (ICCO), especially in relation to the final stage of the book’s publication.

In all areas of research, Jan Koert Bakker from the ESLA resource centre played a very important role, constantly supplying the researchers with a stream of relevant articles, reports and book publications.

The editors are also very grateful for the substantial assistance of Erika Kastelein, who was our office assistant during the finalization of the book, and we would also like to thank Meindert Slagter for his proofreading and Gideon de Jong for correcting the references.

Prof. Sabine Schmidt-Lauff from the Technical University Chemnitz in Germany (Department of Adult Education) was responsible for the blind review of the book, and we would like to thank her for her fruitful feedback and useful suggestions for improvements to research in the ESLA project.

Finally, we would like to thank Rosa Zijlstra, a Master’s student at the University of Groningen, who took the cover photograph for this book during her research on the role of teachers in the prevention of early school leaving at a primary school near Uganda Martyrs University.

Groningen, Nkozi and Zomba, January 2010
1. INTRODUCTION

I am Johannah and I am 18 years old. I never even reached Grade 8. My family survives from my mother’s little income which is not enough for us. Sometimes they could not even pay for my school fees. Sometimes there was nothing to eat and I went to school with an empty stomach. For those reasons I did not go to school any more, but my parents didn’t know. I hung around, played cards with other girls and slept with guys without condoms. Finally I fell pregnant. That was when school was nothing to me but a taboo.

Johannah is just one example of an early school leaver in the rural areas of the northern part of South Africa. This short account of her life story highlights part of a complex of problems that have become visible in many sub-Saharan countries over the last twenty years (Al-Samarrai & Benell, 2003). According to a recent UNESCO report ‘...sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 47 percent of out-of-school children worldwide – a stark reminder of the scale of global inequalities in the distribution of opportunities for education’ (UNESCO, 2008, p. 61). Elements of this complex problem include the relevance and quality of primary and secondary schools, lack of guidance, for example in issues of sex education, problems with English as a second language, lack of parental involvement, and – as in the case of Johannah – the impact of poverty. Furthermore, multiple individual factors, such as learning problems and disabilities, although not well researched as yet in Africa, seem to play an important role as well. All of these factors result in a high drop-out rate, huge youth unemployment and the marginalization of numerous young people, vulnerable to crime, HIV/AIDS and various forms of abuse (Conen & Rutter, 2003; Kaniki, 2006; Kelemba, 2005; Modiba & Zeelen, 2006; Rajani & Robinson, 1999; Ramphele, 2002).

Addressing the issues highlighted and exploring new ways of dealing with them form the core of this book, which is a result of intensive collaboration between researchers and other stakeholders from several African countries and researchers from the North.

Below we will first introduce the background to the ESLA project, including an explanation of the term ‘early school leaving’, a description of our objectives, research questions and approach, as well as an overview of the activities of the project thus far. In the second section of this introduction, the themes of this book and a brief outline of the content of the chapters will be presented.
In 2007, a group of researchers discussed the above-mentioned issues and early school leaving in sub-Saharan countries. This discussion took place in the context of a collaborative project between Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) in Nkozi, Uganda, Mzumbe University, near Morogoro in Tanzania and the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Many examples and experiences of educational exclusion came to the fore. Colleagues in Uganda and Tanzania showed great interest in the earlier activities of the University of Groningen and the University of Limpopo concerning the school drop-out problem in South Africa. An important collaborative project in Limpopo Province was the BASWA project (BASWA means ‘youth’ in Northern Sotho), founded in 2000, which involved stakeholders from education, business and civil society (youth and parent organizations). It entailed new intervention programmes on three interrelated tracks: a) development of training programmes for guidance teachers; b) establishment of student support centres to refer out-of-school youth to specialized social workers and link them with local businesses; c) development of alternative pathways for early school leavers to access the formal and informal labour markets (Rampedi & Zeelen, 2000). Connecting to these experiences in South Africa was considered an ideal starting point for investigating such problems in the East-African context and therefore the partners decided to start the ESLA project, with the first funding coming from NUFFIC\(^1\) and ICCO\(^2\).

Early School Leaving in Tanzania and Uganda

A closer look into educational exclusion in Tanzania and Uganda during the first discussions of the researchers involved in the project revealed similar problems to those occurring in South Africa. In Tanzania, Rajani and Robinson (1999) reported a substantial increase in drop-out rates in the school year 1996/1997, especially in standards 5 and 6, increasing from 3.5 percent to 13.6 percent. Kaniki (2006) showed that the transition rate from primary to secondary school in rural areas remained below 40 percent between 1961 and 2003. He also pointed to the growing number of orphans due to HIV/AIDS, which caused an increase in drop-out rates. Moreover, the role of guidance and counselling remains marginal in Tanzanian schools, despite the fact that its importance is explicitly mentioned in the Tanzania Education and Training Policy of 1995 (TETP, Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995).

In Uganda, the problem of early school leaving appears similar, but it also has a more specific dimension. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, the inability to pay school fees accounts for 62 percent of drop-outs. The second highest cause of drop-out is pregnancy and marriage, accounting for 11 percent. The highest drop-out rates occur at lower school levels (Republic of Uganda, Ministry of Education and Sports, 2005; see also Mukama & Murindwa-Rutanga, 2004).

Furthermore, vocational schools and polytechnics are not focal points for Ugandan education policy. Mainstream education is seen as the only solution for everyone,
and those dropping out of school face massive problems. Another specific, even more dramatic problem for Uganda is the war-affected youth, such as those children who became part of the rebel groups in the north of Uganda (Angucia, Zeelen & De Jong, 2010). Forcedly removed from their parents, community and schools, many of these children and youth missed substantial years of schooling and are currently struggling to find a place in society.

International Policies

In light of all of these problems it is promising that the importance of education as a human right has been internationally recognized. Over the last decades, countless policy documents, newspaper articles and academic publications have stressed the extent of the problems mentioned above. Increasingly, education has been promoted as one of the most important prerequisites for development, especially of the rural areas in developing countries where illiteracy levels are still very high (Tukundane, 2008). For this reason, government structures, international agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) have targeted education through many programmes and invested in it substantially. Especially in the last decade there has been a renewed commitment to the promotion of education as one of the major strategies of poverty reduction and rural development in developing countries. Governments and international agencies have decided to make education a joint priority, as described by Tukundane (2008), with five new initiatives adopted to promote cooperative endeavours aimed at enhancing development and education: The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2000–2015; Education for All (EFA) 2000–2015; The United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) 2003–2012; The Girls and Women’s Education Initiative (2005) and The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) 2005–2014.

These five initiatives have in common the idea that education is a key to enabling people (men and women, boys and girls) to fulfil their potential and take greater control over decisions that affect them. Education is seen as a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for development. In other words, without educating the population no community can foster development. This is even more true in the context of the increasing impact of globalization on the development of African countries and huge new demands concerning the knowledge and capabilities of people.

However, according to the researchers from the three universities involved in the ESLA project, there is reason to be concerned about the implementation of these positive policy intentions. There is a huge gap between current educational policies and the realities of educational exclusion in sub-Saharan countries. In the discussions between the ESLA partners, questions arose concerning the emphasis such policies placed on access and enrolment in education and the neglect of the issue of retaining learners at school and drop-out processes. Dealing with these gaps in policy and contributing to overcoming them became one of the central motives of the ESLA project.
What do we mean by Early School Leaving?

Before we provide more detail on the objectives and approach of the project it is necessary to explain the use of terms such as ‘early school leaving’ and ‘early school leavers,’ in relation to the more common terms ‘dropping out’ and ‘drop-outs.’ In discussions, some researchers in South Africa pointed out the negative connotation of the term ‘drop-out’ – which suggests that it is a purely individual decision by a learner to leave school (see Conen & Rutten, 2003). The question that needed to be asked was whether or not the school system also pushes out learners, and on this basis some researchers have discussed the term ‘push-outs’ (see for example Cassidy & Bates, 2005). Other terms that are more common and used in a broader context are, for example, ‘displaced youth’, ‘out-of-school youth’, ‘marginalized youth’, and even ‘raw youth’, a term employed in 1959 by one of the founding fathers of the Tanzanian trade unions, B.S. Kajunjumele, to describe young unemployed people hanging around in the big cities of Africa (Burton, 2006). Another consideration which is valid in relation to the critical use of terminology, especially in Africa, is not to forget the ‘never-enrollers’, referring to those people, and especially girls, who never had the opportunity to go to school. It is also important to ask how those young people see themselves. Do they always recognize themselves in the labels invented by researchers and policymakers? For example, do the boda boda drivers of Kampala, who often leave school to take the opportunity to make fast money, consider themselves to be drop-outs, or much more positively – as successful motorcycle taxi-drivers?

The complex features of a situation in which the political and educational systems as well as various actors all have an effect, led us to prefer the more neutral terms ‘early school leaving’ and ‘early school leavers’. At the same time, we are aware of the shortcomings of these terms. For example, in relation to the term ‘early’, there are contextual issues to be considered. At what point (and on the basis of what type of education) are learners ready for life beyond school and able to participate successfully in African society and its labour market? Should the minimum requirements for the timing of this transition be the same in different contexts?

Finally, we should be aware of the fact that even learners who successfully complete secondary school, and even people with a degree in higher education, have great difficulties finding a job or generating income. This is due to structural problems in the education system in African countries in relation to preparing people for the informal and formal labour markets.

In this book, most authors use the terms ‘dropping out’ and ‘early school leaving’ interchangeably. We will see that it does not seem useful to have a universal definition of early school leaving which suits every country or region, as determining the educational level which is sufficient for success in the labour market of remote rural areas in Uganda, for example, involves different issues compared to the situation in Kampala. On this basis, the contextualization of the definition seems unavoidable. We suggest that fruitful discussion about terms, definitions and the criteria for levels of qualification should continue to be part of the ongoing research and interaction between relevant stakeholders involved in education, the community, business and policy structures in specific contexts.
Objectives, Research Questions and Approach

The overall objective of the ESLA project is to contribute to combating early school leaving in African countries, starting with Uganda and Tanzania. The project aims to contribute a) to the prevention and reduction of early school leaving in primary and secondary schools, as well as b) to enhance strategies and programmes to support early school leavers who by definition have left the education system.

The important research questions are: What factors contribute to early school leaving? What problems do early school leavers face, what needs do they have and what coping strategies do they use? What are the existing practices and policies on early school leaving? and How can these practices and programmes be improved?

The project uses a participatory approach through combining research and development, addressing the problem at different levels and involving various relevant actors, such as government administration at various levels, NGOs, schools, local communities, businesses, parents and the youth themselves.

Activities thus far and the Background of this Book

The ESLA project started with several exploratory studies in Tanzania and Uganda, with the help of Master’s students from the Netherlands, Tanzania and Uganda. Among this research were state of the art studies concerning primary and secondary schools (Tromp, 2008; Van Walbeek, 2008), and more specific studies on parental involvement (Okello, 2007), the position of girls (Zijlstra, 2009), intervention programmes (Waniha, 2008) and coping strategies (Peels, 2008). Moreover, studies on early school leaving in the Netherlands were also undertaken (Kuiper, 2008; Pranger, 2007), based on the assumption that comparing experiences from the South and the North could lead to an inspiring cross-fertilization. In this book some of the Master’s students will feature as co-authors, while other authors also refer to their studies.

In addition, two workshops were organized, the first in Tanzania in June 2007 and the second in Uganda in November of the same year, in which early research results were discussed with stakeholders such as teachers, parents, learners, community members and departments of education. The project aims to enhance such communities of practice to establish partnerships between researchers, policymakers, educators, communities and young people themselves.

In October 2008, an invitational three-day conference was organized in Dar-es-Salaam. In addition to researchers and policymakers from Tanzania, Uganda and the Netherlands, those from other African countries such as Kenya, Malawi, Lesotho and Sudan were also invited to participate, with the intention being to share the results of our studies and gain more insight into the dynamics of the early school leaving phenomenon. The challenges faced by the different countries were intensively discussed. The reworked and enriched contributions to this conference, complemented by chapters from others who were not able to participate in the conference, form the content of this book.

With this book we hope to enhance the academic and policy debate about the main aspects of educational exclusion and early school leaving in Africa. We are aware
that the content of the book does not cover all the realities and developments in sub-Saharan Africa. Countries in East and Southern Africa receive the most attention, and even those regions are not fully covered. Therefore we see the book as a starting point for new partnerships in research and further development initiatives in other African countries.

This is not to say that these issues have never been addressed. Dealing with the issue of early school leaving and the post-colonial legacy of educational exclusion has a long history in Africa. Several innovative policies, programmes and good practices are relevant in this respect, such as the concept of community schools, vocational programmes at polytechnics (Hoppers & Komba, 1995), the ideas of Julius Nyerere concerning self-reliance (Mulenga, 2001) and the vocational programmes of the Brigades in Botswana (Youngman, 2000). In this book, authors will refer to some of these initiatives and concepts to avoid reinventing the wheel.

THE THEMES AND CHAPTERS

The book is structured around four themes. The first part will set the scene, with contributions from Uganda, Lesotho, Tanzania and the Netherlands. In Part 2, four chapters will explore the background issues of globalization, tradition and conflict, including experiences from Sudan and Uganda. The focus in Part 3 is on gender issues, while, in the final part, contributions will discuss intervention programmes for early school leavers in South Africa, Uganda, Malawi and Kenya.

As indicated, the book is a collection of chapters which stand and can be read on their own. Authors from several African countries provide deep insights into the specific realities of educational exclusion in their own country. This means that several discourses in specific domains and contexts will be addressed, and in some places overlap could not be avoided. To bring several threads together, in the closing chapter of the book the editors will reflect on the various content of the chapters. The contributions will be interrelated, emphasizing similarities and differences, with the intention of identifying lessons learned, outlining new issues for future research and providing a basis for fostering partnerships.

Part 1: Setting the Scene: Contributions on Policy, Curriculum and Coping Strategies

George Openjuru begins the book with an examination of government education policies in Uganda in relation to the problem of early school leaving. An important point of reference for this work is an analysis of the history of missionary and colonial education in Uganda. The author goes deeper into policy developments after Ugandan independence, examining the policies of Universal Primary Education and Vocational Education and Training. In his conclusions, Openjuru finds that good policy proposals to combat educational exclusion mostly remain on paper and that the policies have failed as yet to create a fully integrated system of vocational training. According to Openjuru, a vital element in avoiding educational exclusion is the availability of vocational education assessment in the student’s own local language.
In the following chapter, Julia Preece and Mapheleba Lekhetho report the findings of a small case study of educational programmes for herd boys in Lesotho who had either never been to school, or who had dropped out of the formal schooling system. After describing the sociocultural, geographical and educational context in Lesotho, their findings show that the communities in Lesotho want the benefits of modernization, including elements of a Western school system. However, they do not want these benefits to be provided at the expense of their own cultural value system. The vocational skills offered in the programmes examined provided opportunities for families to benefit economically, and the literacy classes created a very good learning environment. Preece and Lekhetho conclude that when learning is seen as relevant and beneficial to people’s lives it is possible to gain community support and achieve self-reliance.

The third chapter is about early school leaving in primary schools in Tanzania. Hanna Peels and Jacques Zeelen discuss the experiences and findings of a field study in the rural areas around Morogoro. The focus is on the coping strategies of early school leavers and the opportunities available for guidance and counselling to prevent early school leaving, as well as support for early school leavers in their daily lives in rural areas. The interviews revealed that early school leavers often have difficulties surviving and finding opportunities to secure their future. They mostly evaluate their time at school critically, regretting the lack of guidance and counselling. The recommendation of the authors is that more should be done to connect rural schools to the realities of life in rural areas. Skills training (for example in agriculture), guidance and counselling should become more prominent in schools.

In Chapter 4, Paul Kibwika, John James Okiror and Florence Birungi-Kyazze pose the question: Does agricultural education prepare early school leavers in Uganda for a career in agriculture? Building on the first contribution by Openjuru, the authors first focus on the history of schooling and agriculture in Uganda, before reporting on two case studies. These were undertaken to determine how school leavers were prepared for a career in agriculture, and examined a vocational agricultural training programme and the practice of teaching agriculture in primary schools. The authors conclude that whereas agriculture will be the most likely form of employment for the majority of early school leavers and those who complete their schooling, it is still far from attractive to young people as a career of choice. Ironically, even those who choose to study agriculture do so in order to gain paid employment in agriculture-related firms, rather than considering becoming agricultural entrepreneurs themselves. Kibwika and colleagues conclude that the greatest challenge faced when it comes to gaining the interest of young people in agriculture is to demonstrate that it can be profitable.

In the final chapter of the first part of this book we learn that early school leaving is not exclusively an African problem. Henrieke Kuiper and Josje van der Linden report and reflect on research conducted in Groningen, a province in the north of the Netherlands. The chapter provides insight into the education system and the problems of early school leaving in the Netherlands. The focus of the chapter is on the early school leavers themselves and the professionals who work with them. The main questions addressed are: Can professionals better succeed in combating
early school leaving through direct contact and interaction with the early school leavers? What kind of approach is used to perform this task successfully and what difficulties do they encounter? One of their conclusions is that the work of these professionals requires patience, time and room to manoeuvre. National and regional policies should promote this, rather than squeeze the professionals between bureaucracy and the market. Another important conclusion is that school should involve far more than merely preparing learners for the labour market. Learners should also be prepared for life and for a role as responsible and active citizens.

Part 2: Exploring the Background: Globalization, Tradition and Conflict

The second part begins with a contribution by Peter Kanyandago, who offers a critical analysis of the post-colonial school-based education system in Uganda. He shows that the phenomenon of early school leaving can largely be attributed to the fact that the dominant education system does not connect to life in the communities, marginalizes the use of African languages and learning about African cultures, and produces ‘systemic’ violence against learners. He calls for an endogenization of the education system by making much more use of community-based learning, in line with the contribution of Preece and Lekhetho. This means that the education system must be influenced by the values and experiences of the beneficiaries in such a way that it improves the livelihoods of those in the community. According to Kanyandago, for situations where this is not possible, for example in urban centres, adjustments should be made, but without abandoning the principle of endogenization. On this point, the tension between development from within and the influence of globalization is tangible.

As indicated earlier, in the complex process of early school leaving, issues of health education play an important role. In the second chapter of this part Saida Fundi explores some alternative ways of addressing health education issues in the coastal regions of Tanzania. In her view, relying fully on the discourse of modernity and rejecting cultural perspectives poses a threat to the development of effective strategies that prevent early school leaving and reduce teenage pregnancies and the spread of HIV/AIDS. While the government and the private sector rely on the modernistic approach, which encourages free access to sexual and reproductive health information for adolescents, there are parallel cultural systems in coastal communities that give people power to diverge from the formal systems. In her recommendations, Fundi stresses the importance of enhancing the willingness of the two worlds to learn and understand their mutual core values, to engage positively in the problems faced by adolescents and to develop ways to engage the youth in this process.

We have mentioned that young people in Africa are vulnerable to political abuse. In northern Uganda a long protracted civil conflict and violence amidst a deep economic crisis has profoundly disrupted the livelihoods of the population, especially the youth. Margaret Angucia and Kennedy Amone-P’Olak, who both recently conducted their PhD research in this area, discuss the relationship between the violent civil conflict in northern Uganda and the issue of early school leaving. In the past,
INTRODUCTION

thousands of school children were forcefully abducted by the rebels and were not able to return to school. When they later re-emerged from the bush they tried to find their way back into education and work. The authors argue that young people who leave school without skills to pursue a livelihood are a potential source of civil unrest, insecurity and violence. New policies should reorient the education system to empower war-affected youth with life skills that will promote peace, understanding, development and participation in civil society.

The impact of a period of war or a post-war situation on the life of learners and early school leavers is further studied in South Sudan. Clement Lado Lako, Josje van der Linden and William Gwang Deng start their analysis with a description of the specific history of Sudan, including the devastating war of the last decades. Looking at the situation in South Sudan in relation to education after the peace of 2005, the authors show that in specific areas the entire educational infrastructure had either been destroyed or was non-existent. Students have to attend classes in the open air, with open learning spaces created under trees that provide some shade but little shelter when it rains. In addition to the poor material conditions, trained teachers are scarce, so most of the schools are run by volunteers. Quite a number of children have lost educational opportunities, and schooling has been disrupted for decades, affecting most children. In relation to making a start to improving educational structures, the authors emphasize the importance of the development of a system of vocational education and income-generating activities tailored to the specific post-war conditions in South Sudan.

Part 3: Educational Exclusion and Gender

In order to combat educational exclusion related to early school leaving it is essential to address the issue of gender. Many authors touch on this issue in their contributions, but two chapters explicitly focus on it.

Speranza Namusisi examines the role of communication in education and how this affects the schooling of rural girls in Uganda, leading them to drop out before completing primary school. She highlights the symbolism used in communication at schools and its impact on girls in their early years of education. On the basis of her empirical research, she shows that girls drop out of school because the language used for communication is inappropriate. For example, the male-dominated patriarchal society of Uganda tends to associate science with masculinity, leaving girls to study the humanities. Girls are often reminded that they have to become mothers and are supposed to look after their siblings. Using the theoretical concepts of Bourdieu and Mead, Namusisi analyses this phenomenon to discover the deeper impact of symbolic communication. She recommends that more research be undertaken on the culture of communication at schools to determine how stereotyping in terms of communication can be avoided in the teaching and learning environment.

Using a gender perspective in the context of educational exclusion includes examining the specific role of men and boys in this respect. In his chapter, Maximiano Ngabirano shows that boys in remote rural areas are profoundly affected by societal and cultural values and this has had an impact on their retention at school.
Most affected in his view are boys from the rural poor who are often pushed out of formal education due to rural cultures that see boys as the hope for their survival. In the cattle-keeping community which Ngabirano describes, an adolescent boy becomes a real man by owning a herd of his own. The author emphasizes that in rural areas ownership of cattle and fields is strongly correlated with poverty and early school leaving. In his conclusions, Ngabirano stresses the importance of a community-based approach, taking into account the individual needs of boys and girls. He suggests an approach that involves communities by addressing their cultures and traditions. This is a lifelong education approach in which communities learn to promote their own good and the good of others.

**Part 4: Combating Educational Exclusion: Intervention Programmes**

As indicated, in the last decade government initiatives, international agencies, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations have developed programmes and projects to combat the immense problem of educational exclusion. In the last part of our book several authors discuss and evaluate such initiatives and provide recommendations for improvement and innovation.

In the first chapter of this part, Jacques Zeelen, Makgwana Rampedi and Wim Boerkamp provide an account of their research work and experiences in the BASWA project in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. This project provides an inspiring example for the ESLA initiative. The important activities of the project were preventing school drop-out, improving the image of vocational education, providing a system of student services, career counselling and guidance, including substantial parental involvement, as well as the implementation of programmes to reconnect young unemployed adults with the formal and informal labour markets. The authors reflect on the experiences gained through this project and draw some lessons which could be useful for other projects working in similar rural conditions. One of the lessons learned in combating educational exclusion effectively is that greater investment in the creation of sustainable networks between government, education, community and business are required.

In their chapter, Cuthbert Tukundane and Marit Blaak explore existing intervention programmes for early school leavers in the rural areas of Uganda. The important aspects of these programmes are non-formal in nature. Initially, research into these programmes, as recently undertaken by Blaak, shows that there are problems with fine-tuning the content to the needs of the learners. Some of the programmes are overly academic and copy the regular educational approach without a needs analysis. The authors emphasize that in the development and implementation of those programmes key stakeholders, including early school leavers themselves, parents, local communities, educationalists, as well as the government, should be involved. Successful programmes appear to be those which are accessible and practical, relevant to the needs of the early school leavers, attractive and empowering, able to enhance knowledge and skills through apprenticeships, and able to contribute to the creation of employment and income-generating opportunities in the rural context.

In the third chapter of this part, Dorothy Nampota examines the experiences of more or less similar Non-Formal Education (NFE) programmes in Malawi.
INTRODUCTION

After defining non-formal education she describes its structures in Malawi, in particular the Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programme. CBE is a pilot project that aims to achieve the learning needs of out-of-school children and youth in a non-formal way. As a researcher, Nampota followed the implementation of this project, with different stakeholders revealing that there have been benefits both to the community and the learners themselves, for example a decrease in illiteracy. However, challenges remaining include poor attendance, which sometimes results in withdrawal, lack of emphasis on vocational skills, lack of income-generating activities, and sometimes a lack of community involvement. Nampota arrives at similar conclusions to Tukundane and Blaak as regards what is required for a successful programme: more consideration of the needs and aspirations of the beneficiaries, the provision of structured programmes which are monitored, the enhancement of ownership, and a holistic and multi-sectoral approach.

In the last chapter of this part, Dinah Mwinzi and Joy Kelemba, who both work at the Ministry of Youth in Nairobi, provide insight into the history and current realities of technical and vocational education in Kenya. Although interesting policy proposals for vocational education existed in the 1970s and 1980s, due to limited resources most of these were not implemented, except at a few technical schools. Eventually the emphasis on technical and vocational courses was lost, resulting in a highly academic system. Elements of vocational education were later further developed in the context of Village Polytechnics and more recently in programmes at so-called Youth Polytechnics. Mwinzi and Kelemba assess the possible value of such programmes to early school leavers. Special attention is paid to the existing gender disparity in vocational education and how this can be overcome.

Afterthoughts

In the last chapter of the book the editors reflect on the different content of the chapters. The contributions will be related to each other to uncover similarities and differences, identify lessons learned and to formulate new issues for further research.

Moreover, on the basis of the contributions from the different countries, suggestions will be made for the way forward for practices, policies and research in the joint effort to combat the educational exclusion of young people who find themselves on the margins of African societies.

NOTES

1 The Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education.
2 The Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation in the Netherlands.

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INTRODUCTION


PART I: SETTING THE SCENE: CONTRIBUTIONS ON POLICY, CURRICULUM AND COPING STRATEGIES
2. GOVERNMENT EDUCATION POLICIES AND THE PROBLEM OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

The Case of Uganda

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines government education policies in Uganda in relation to the problems of early school leavers, which is known to be a problem in the country. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education and Sports, few students (45,000 out of 180,000) who join secondary school in Senior 1 make it to their sixth and final year of secondary education. The problem of early school leaving has received little attention in terms of policy provision and support despite the introduction of universal access to education. This chapter will therefore focus on policy provisions and gaps that lead to the problem of early school leaving, examining attempts that have been made to put in place policies that could reduce the problem of early school leaving. Recommendations are made on how policies can be used to overcome the problem of leaving school early.

INTRODUCTION

Uganda government education policies and efforts are geared towards enhancing access. Even the Education for All (EFA) goal is focusing on increasing access and gender equity. When dealing with the problems of early school leaving, attention is given to its causes such as inability to pay fees, which account for 62 percent of early school leavers, pregnancy and marriage, which account for up to 11 percent (see Anisef, Brown, Kelli & Walters, 2008; Okello, 2007). The relationship between education policies and the problem of early school leaving has not yet been examined.

This chapter examines the different education policies in Uganda with respect to the problem of early school leaving. It begins with a brief theoretical framework used in analysing the policies and policy process and moves onto discussing the concept of early school leaving. This is followed by a review of the educational policy background in Uganda, from the inception of formal school education. The examination of existing policies focuses specifically on the new Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (BTWET) Act (2008) with its key provision – the Uganda Vocational Qualification Framework (UVQF). The UVQF merits examination
because it provides for the accreditation of vocational training programmes and out-of-school skills acquisition through apprenticeships. The UVQF will be examined in relation to the problem of early school leavers, specifically paying attention to its credibility as an alternative route to the acquisition and validation of skills acquired outside the formal school setting and as a learning and certification route for early school leavers. In examining this policy, the chapter attempts to establish whether it was developed with the school leavers in mind. Before looking at BTVET policy, the chapter discusses the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy, the Uganda National Examination policy and the language of instruction policy, all of which appear to be policies whose implementation seems to be contributing to the problem of early school leavers. All these policies are equally important with respect to the attainment of EFA goals.

The discussions in this chapter are set against the backdrop of the general public beliefs, expectations and attitudes towards education and early school leaving, which are the environment within which education policies are constructed and implemented in Uganda. The chapter shows how similar previous good policies such as the Industrial Training Decree and Act of 1972 failed due to little public awareness of its value for education. The chapter concludes with some recommendations on how such policies can be implemented to make them readily acceptable and therefore naturally addressing the problem of early school leaving.

THE THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON POLICY
FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Policy analysis is meaningful, if the analytical framework or theoretical perspective is clear. This section discusses the different theoretical models currently used in policy analysis and outlines the model used to analyse the different educational policies in Uganda in relation to the problem of early school leaving. The argument focuses on the policy implementation process rather than on the policy statements, pronouncements or promulgation. The argument is premised on the assumption that a good policy formulation process should provide an implementation framework which can be effective in guiding action and service delivery. In other words, a good policy statement which does not go beyond being a pronouncement is in effect a bad policy. The implementation environment should be seen as the most important factor in policy formulation and should be taken into account during policy development (see Efretuei, 2006). This is also supported by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), who according to Rampedi (2003):

... view policy implementation as that part of a public programme following the initial setting of goals, securing agreement and commitment of funds. To them it means: ‘to carry out, accomplish, fulfil, produce, and complete … a policy’. Significantly they mention that ‘implement’ must have an object like ‘policy’. They argue that it is a mistake to divorce implementation from policy (Rampedi, 2003, p. 24).
I subscribe to the above view that sees policy formulation and implementation as part of a single policy process that must not be considered separately. Therefore, a non-implemented policy should not be seen as a good policy.

Many theories of policy formulation and implementation are used in policy analysis. Efretuei (2006) identifies five such theories: the functional policy stages/phases framework, the multi-actor/group theoretical framework, the top-down theoretical framework, the bottom-up theoretical framework and the advocacy coalition theoretical model. The common thread through all five frameworks is their concern with the policy formulation or development process.

This chapter uses the functional stages/phases framework, which focuses on the analysis of all stages in policy formulation, implementation and enforcement. The stage theory covers the entire policy process, ‘from policy initiation, agenda setting, policy process design, policy analysis, policy formulation, decision making, policy diagramming, policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation’ (Efretuei, 2006, p. 61). The stage model, according to Efretuei (2006), takes into account the policy formulation and implementation environment, which is very important to policy success. The present analysis of education policies in Uganda considers popular public expectations, demands and resistance as part of this policy implementation environment that must be taken into account when formulating/developing new policies. Policies that fail to take into account the necessity of informing service delivery behaviours basically fail to address the implementation environment. This environment provides the crucial contextual factors that influence policy success.

Additionally, while articulating the cultural pluralist approach to policy analysis, Bourk and Worthington state that:

Instead of perceiving policy as the implementation of decisions made by senior politicians, it is seen as a process informed, constrained and contingent on a number of interdependent material (e.g. economic conditions, legislation, technology) and cultural factors operating in a dynamic state of flux. Policy is also identified as the site of struggle where social actors wrestle for legitimacy and domination (Bourk & Worthington, 1999, p. 14).

This is the perspective adopted to analyse Uganda’s education policies in relation to the problem of early school leaving. Effectively, good policy statements are worth nothing if they do not achieve their stated goals and objectives.

The analytical position taken in this chapter is that policy implementation is still very much part of the policy process because the end of a policy process does not lie in its statement, pronouncement or promulgation but in influencing service delivery to move in a direction which should lead to the realization of the stated policy goals and objectives.

According to this theory of policy formulation and implementation, the response of the policy beneficiaries is as important as the role of the policy formulators in ensuring the policy’s success. In this analysis there are different or multiple layers of actors who work on the basis of their own understanding and individual social and economic interests when responding to the formal policy pronouncement by
government. The consequences of this process are usually unpredictable (Bourk & Worthington, 1999), due to the possibility of a conflict of interest between the various stakeholders.

THE CONCEPT OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN UGANDA

Early school leavers are learners who fail to complete their full cycle of schooling. This phenomenon of early school leaving demands special attention. Ideally, all schooling should end with a formal qualification acknowledged with a certificate issued by a recognized body. These certificates state what a person can do as a vocation or career in life.

In Uganda generally, early school leavers are referred to as, ‘school drop-outs’. The political incorrectness of the language notwithstanding, the problem of being out-of-school early or of not completing the full cycle of education is not accepted in all societies, rich or poor. In most cases, early school leavers are seen as losers and they are stigmatised by society rather than assisted.

THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN UGANDA

Formal school education in Uganda was introduced by the early Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth century. Their primary objective was to spread their religious faith by providing their Christian converts with the necessary skills to access and understand the Bible. They had an open policy of reaching anybody interested in their teaching. The learners qualified by becoming a Christian.

The missionaries later introduced some vocational skills training into their educational programmes to prepare their converts for Christian life. The teaching of secular knowledge was also meant to change their converts’ way of life that was tied to their traditional practices and beliefs that were not compatible with their new faith (Ssekamwa, 2000). There were no drop-outs since education was not highly structured and achievement was measured through acceptance and practicing of the Christian faith and a change in the learner’s way of life to that which is consistent with their new Christian faith. This form of education was later replaced by a more structured formal education system that was also initially implemented by the missionaries.

With the growth of missionary education, some form of control was instituted in 1917 through the establishment of an advisory council on education charged with the responsibility of initiating policies that guided the provision of education by the missionaries. Before its establishment each Christian faith had its own Board of Education. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) also had their Board of Education established in 1904 and it promulgated the self-reliant policies that guided the establishment of new schools by the CMS (Ssekamwa, 2000). The activities of the advisory council on education marked the beginning of formal policies guiding the provision of education in Uganda. Before then the provision of education was based on the experiences and religious principles of the missionaries. The creation of the advisory council led to the structuring of the missionary education.
According to Ssekamwa (2000), the educational structure had the catechist schools at its base, moving to the village schools, then vernacular schools and central schools, and finally secondary schools. At each stage the scope of the curriculum would widen to include more academic subjects and less vocational skills training.

The secondary schools were boarding schools under the control of the white missionaries. This new policy of establishing boarding schools meant the separation of the child or learner from their home environment, thus curtailing their chances of learning the traditional survival skills of the community. Inherent in this arrangement was the danger of the child missing out on the benefits of both school and community should they fail to establish a new way of life through school education. This was the start of the problem of early school leaving.

Not everybody who joined a catechist school made it to secondary school. But, since the lower levels emphasized vocational and religious training, those who left school before secondary level still had an equal sense of accomplishment. Every level of education was self-contained and not a preparation for the next stage. Therefore, those who left school at the lower level were not early school leavers or drop-outs. In any case, continuation was not based on performance but on lineages. Quoting Hatterslay, Ssekamwa (2000, p. 42) explains that, ‘high schools cater for the sons of chiefs, clergy and other influential natives with the object of developing Christian character in those who will eventually rule this country.’ The policy here was to promote a specific group of people for leadership. The ordinary people had to end their schooling at the village or vernacular school level or below.

In 1922 the British colonial government started taking keen interest in the provision of education with the release of the Phelps-Stokes Commission report (Syngellakis & Arudo, 2006; Ministry of Education and Sports, 1999). The Phelps-Stokes Commission made several policy recommendations designed to broaden and streamline the educational curriculum of the missionaries beyond its focus on religion. The policy sought to include vocational training in agriculture and technical subjects to make education relevant to the local community life, as Ssekamwa (2000, p. 60) states that, ‘the advancement of the community as a whole would have to be achieved through improvement of agriculture, native industries, and the improvement of health.’

This policy focused on preparing learners for life after school, thereby avoiding the problem of leaving school without any vocational skills. The implementation of this good policy was not emphasised by both government and the local people, who preferred an education system that would give them white-collar jobs in offices. The outcome of this preference was not only the creation of school leavers with irrelevant qualifications but also graduates who had skills that were equally irrelevant for life in their communities and their native industries (Ssekamwa, 2000).

To oversee the implementation of its policies, the British colonial government established the first government Department of Education in 1925 headed by a Director of Education. The purpose of this department was to control, support and guide the provision of education by the missionaries and also to establish new
schools to promote education in the country (Ssekamwa, 2000). Although the British colonial government took control of schools, they left the management of the schools to their religious founders, but preferred to control the curriculum taught in such schools (Whitehead, n.d). For a long time this policy arrangement removed the government from direct control of the schools and consequently it was not in a position to guarantee the implementation of its policy recommendations.

The De Bunsen Committee of 1952 was appointed after the Phelps-Stokes Commission, to study and make policy recommendations for improving the provision of education in Uganda. The De Bunsen Committee, ‘recommended among other things: (a) the expansion of secondary education in order to provide teachers for primary and junior secondary school; (b) the expansion of facilities, both primary and secondary for girls; (c) the establishment of new primary schools’ (Syngellakis & Arudo, 2006, p. 3; Ministry of Education and Sports, 1999, p. 8). This policy pronouncement had a clear objective of increasing access to school education. Prior to the De Bunsen Committee there were other important commissions such as the De La Warr Commission of 1937, which had been created to develop higher education policies in East Africa. The Binns Study Groups also made a number of policy recommendations in relation to the provision of higher education in East Africa (Ssekamwa, 2000; Whitehead, n.d).

Upon taking responsibility for education in Uganda, the Department of Education came up with a new structure of education, which consisted of connected levels of education from catechists schools to university. In addition, there were separate technical schools which taught vocational skills (Ssekamwa, 2000). The introduction of connected levels of schooling meant that the lower levels of education became a preparation for the next level and those who left before the designated end became early school leavers. The separation of technical education from what became mainstream education and the transfer of ‘weak’ students from the mainstream to a technical school enhanced the stigmatisation of technical education. The Phelps-Stokes Commission recommendation emphasizing agricultural and technical education and training as mainstream education was ignored leading to the education system becoming more academic. The danger of emphasizing academic learning was that those who did not reach the designated end failed to acquire employable skills, thus creating the problem of early school leavers.

The post-colonial government that came after 1963 continued favouring an academic curriculum with lower levels being seen as preparation for higher education. Practical vocational training was provided to those who were perceived as “academically weak”. Vocational training continued to be relegated to a lower status and schools which emphasized technical training were shunned by both parents and learners who did not want to be perceived as “losers”. At the same time, academic school programmes were perceived to be of greater value despite all its risk of producing early school leavers with limited skills and knowledge preferred for modern office white-collar jobs. Ironically the local people actively resisted an educational policy designed to provide an education that would help improve life in their communities in favour of one which required them to adopt a way of life and means of livelihood which removed their young ones from their community roots (Ssekamwa, 2000).
The reasons for the failure of the vocational education policy were many. Firstly, the local people thought it was a way of denying them access to highly prized white-collar jobs and confining them instead to manual work such as farming, which they found demeaning. Secondly, local people also saw academic education as a way of resisting British colonialism because the colonial administrators feared the proliferation of academic education because it would lead to political upheaval when people failed to find the jobs. Thirdly, the white teachers were not trained to teach the practical subjects because most of them had an academic background and were not able to envisage an education system which was relevant to local conditions. Fourthly, the colonial administrators themselves continued to favour those who studied the academic curriculum by giving them well-paid jobs in contrast to those who undertook the practical vocational curriculum. With the failure of vocational education, the favoured academic education was ingrained and policies that supported it upheld, thus consolidating the problem of early school leaving. With popular resistance to educational policies that emphasized vocational training and agriculture and an increase in white-collar positions arising due to the departure of expatriate colonial civil servants, the academic curriculum became increasingly popular during the post-colonial period. More academically oriented schools were established and the few vocational and technical secondary schools that had been established were converted to academic schools to meet the demand for civil servants (see Ssekamwa, 2000).

However, in 1963 the Castle Commission once again attempted to redirect the country’s educational system towards agricultural and technical education, including the expansion of girls’ education and the provision of adult education (Muhwezi, 2003). The rapid expansion of the academic curriculum and preference for higher education led to a realization in 1963 of the danger of over-training people who were not practically productive. The Castle Commission recommended that the primary education curriculum should include some aspects of preparation for the world of work and not only for secondary and higher education (Umoh, 2003). For reasons already discussed above, this idea did not leave the drawing board. The academically inclined primary school curriculum continued. The policies were being proposed without any thoughts for a supportive economic and social environment, such as higher pay and status for people with vocational training.

During the 1970s there was a favourable policy provision for early school leavers. This was the Industrial Training Decree of 1972, which was brought into force by the Industrial Training Act 1972. Both the Decree and the Act were meant to ‘make provision for the training needs of personnel [sic] in industries, to provide a scheme of trade testing, to provide for the imposition of a training levy and for matters connected therewith’ (Government of Uganda, 1972a, p. 4; Government of Uganda, 1972b, p. 2989). The decree established the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT), the Industrial Training Council, the Advisory Training Committee and the Training Levy as structures for the implementation of the Act. The Act created a training route for early school leavers, providing for apprenticeship training under contracts for a particular period and a training levy to support it. This good policy was never implemented successfully because it was not accepted.
by the general public of Uganda who continued to favour more academically oriented educational programmes. Another similar Act (the BTWET Act), has been enacted in 2008 (this is discussed later in the chapter).

The period from 1980 to 1990 was treated as a time of recovery and it was not until 1992 that a major educational policy initiative was undertaken. Since then there have been many educational policy changes and initiatives in Uganda. The first policy change was initiated through the 1989 education policy review commission, entitled, ‘Education for National Integration and Development’. This review culminated into the Government White Paper on Education of 1992. The White Paper presented a comprehensive education policy proposal that was tabled and approved by parliament to guide educational provision at all levels and sectors in Uganda (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1992). The primary policy objectives of the White Paper were increasing access, improving the quality of educational management and achieving equity (Muhwezi, 2003; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2001). Access was interpreted as getting all children into school. With a strong focus on increasing enrolment, little attention was given to those dropping out before completing their full educational cycle. The statistical evidence emphasizing access in terms of high enrolment is strongly pronounced, and celebrated, while those revealing early school leaving are treated with some measure disquiet.

Whatever the case, the government White Paper on the educational policy review commission report of 1992, recommendations R129 to 131, concerned the strengthening of technical and vocational institutions. Recommendation R130 was a restatement of the recommendation of the Phelps-Stokes Commission of 1924/25, which established a category of post-secondary school called Central Schools to implement a practical curriculum in agriculture and technical skills. Unfortunately this failed and the schools were converted to an academic curriculum schools. These schools were Sir Samuel Baker School and Layibi College in Gulu, Mbarara High School in Mbarara and Nabumali High School in Mbale (Ssekamwa, 2000).

The 1989 Kajubi Commission recommendation R130 proposed:

Conversion of general secondary and technical schools into vocational secondary schools should be carried out in a phased manner with sufficient advanced planning and commitment of financial resources (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1992, p. 134).

This recommendation was accepted by parliament and it was to be implemented within five years of its pronouncement in 1992. This never happened and Uganda lost another opportunity to create an education system which could prepare learners for life and provide them with the skills to make a positive contribution to the economy of Uganda.

UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

The most significant policy initiative of the 1992 Education White Paper was the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1996. Universal Primary Education started as a scheme to provide free education to four children per family,
and was to be gradually expanded to include all children (Ndeezi, 2000). However, when it became difficult to administer the four-child scheme due to the rather complicated African family structure and social relationships, the government opened primary education to all school-aged children. This opening up led to a significant increase in pupil enrolment, as noted by the Uganda Investment Authority report:

Between 1986 and 1996, primary school enrolment rose modestly from 2.2 million to 3.1 million. But with the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997, it jumped to 5.3 million, an increase of 70% in just one year. By 1999, the number had risen to 6.6 million, and the Ministry of Education and Sports expects numbers to reach 6.8 million by 2003 (Uganda Investment Authority, 2004, p. 31).

Not to undermine the apparent success of the policy, drop-out rates are ignored. Consequently, the problem of leaving school early can not attract policy interest. The evidence of drop out is clear in attendance statistics for each successive level of primary school education (from Primary 1 to 7), it shows a consistent decline, as Onghwens points out:

By 2003, the distribution of students across the seven years of the primary education cycle was as follows: 25% for primary 1; 16% for primary 2; 15% for primary 3; 14% for primary 4; 13% for primary 5; 10% for primary 6; and 6% for primary 7. This suggests that there is significant drop out of pupils from the primary education cycle (Onghwen, 2009, p. 52).

While the figures are noted, what happens to the percentage lost in each successive year of primary education needs to be addressed through policy initiatives that pay attention to the rates of attrition in the education system.

Without minding about those who dropped out, new policies that provide more opportunities for those who continue were put in place in the form of Universal Secondary Education (USE). Uganda launched the Universal Post-Primary Education and Training (UPPET) programme in 2007 to enable eligible UPE graduates to enrol in tuition-free secondary and vocational training institutions (Bugembe, 2009). This programme is popularly referred to as USE (Universal Secondary Education).

In spite of this generous arrangement, not every child is able to access UPE/USE and not all who initially enrol in UPE are able to make it to university or tertiary education, either because their parents are misinformed about the policies or they simply cannot afford to pay for exercise books, pens, school uniforms and food to keep their children at school. In line with the theoretical position stated above, the UPE/USE policy did not have a comprehensive implementation strategy which addressed the problem of dropping out, and policy misinterpretation by beneficiaries.

THE UGANDA NATIONAL EXAMINATION POLICY

The implementation of the Uganda National Examinations Board Act 1983 (Ch. 137) is also a major cause of early school leaving. The Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) administers exams that mark the transition from one stage of education...
to the next. These are the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE), the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) and the Uganda Advance Certificate of Education (UACE). These are the most important examinations in the life of Ugandans and they are also the turning points in the lives of most early school leavers. These examinations are used to select candidates who will proceed to the next stage of education. Those who fail to be selected are left out. Since the curriculum is heavily academic, those who are left out often have no employable skills apart from being able to read, write and speak English.

The UNEB exams are used as filters to remove ‘weak’ or ‘poor’ students. This is reinforced by Uganda’s education system which is more concerned with the quality of the students joining the next levels of education than with the quality of learning taking place at a given level. The assumption is that, if you select the best, you will send out the best. For that reason, there are very stringent selection criteria and/or high ‘cut-off points’, which cut off large numbers of learners and push them out of the school system labelling them failures because they do not qualify to go on to the next stage. Those who are pushed out constitute the early school leavers, alongside those who fail to cope with the pre-exam classes or those who are ‘eliminated’ at the secondary school level or ‘discontinued’ at university level. Syngelakis and Arudo note this as follows:

The education system consist of four levels of institutions, each followed by a national selection exam which feeds a centrally administered process of distributing successful candidates among the options available at the next level. Large numbers of students are forced out of the system at each transition stage because of limited capacity at the next level (Syngellakis & Arudo, 2006, p. 3).

This reveals the brutality of Uganda’s educational system and, I believe, in other countries with similar model of education. It is extremely competitive and to a large extent elitist and designed to exclude a large section of the population. As Aguti (2002) describes:

School education was introduced in Uganda by the white missionaries mainly for the children of chiefs and to provide for functionaries needed by the British colonial government. So right from the onset, this school system was not for all and it therefore grew to become highly selective and competitive with fewer and fewer students continuing to the next level of education (2002, p. 5).

In addition, the examinations are not particularly comprehensive, as they do not take into account all the areas of learning that occur in school, such as the building of a moral and upright character and the development of sporting talents. These equally important areas of knowledge and skills are not taken into consideration when making decisions regarding the progress of a learner to the next level. Consequently, in most cases, students who excel in outdoor or sporting activities but not in the examinations are still left out, unless they obtain a negotiated entry to the next level. The present examination therefore discriminates against learners who are not well suited to the classroom and academically inclined schoolwork.
It is a contradiction that such excluding educational arrangements co-exists alongside policies that are meant to increase access at all levels. The contradiction is even more evident when so much attention is paid to entry rates while so little attention is paid to completion. Universal education policies emphasize entry, the equity policy designed to increase the number of girls in education emphasizes entry and the centrally administered selection policy also emphasizes entry, while the market and the economy are left to deal with the completion. It is obvious that right from its inception, formal school education had a design problem that makes leaving school early a problem, which is always mentioned en passant, as we see in the remarks of Aguti (2002) and Syngellakis and Arudo (2006) above.

I would like to conclude this section by stating that while education policy is rightfully concerned with encouraging all children to go to school, it should equally be concerned with keeping them there and uncompromisingly concerned with how many of the millions enrolling in the system are actually completing it. It defies reason to bring over a million children into the system and end up with only dozens achieving meaningful exits from it. To overcome the problem of early school leaving, the national examination is an area that demands serious reform under the pursuit of the EFA goals.

THE LANGUAGE POLICY AND LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN UGANDA

Uganda had no clear national language policy. The debate vacillated between the adoption of Swahili or Luganda as the national language. This was a dilemma that could not be resolved for a long time. Now the situation has been resolved in favour of Swahili to promote the spirit of the East African Community. The 1992 government White Paper on education also stipulates that:

Kiswahili and English will be taught as compulsory subjects to all children throughout the primary cycle, in both rural and urban areas. Emphasis in terms of allocation of time and the provision of instructional materials, facilities and teachers will, however, be gradually placed on Kiswahili as the language possessing greater capacity for uniting Ugandans and for assisting rapid social development (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1992, p. 19).

The position of English as the official language is still strong (Mpuga, 2003; Pawliková-Vilhanová, 1996). English is still the language of everyday administration and also the lingua franca, unlike in Kenya and Tanzania where Swahili is the lingua franca. Although Swahili is used in trade and commerce in Uganda, until recently it was not taught in schools (Mpuga, 2003; Pawliková-Vilhanová, 1996). Unlike Swahili, English is learnt at school in most cases and it is also the language of instruction, although it is sometimes referred to cynically as the language of destruction.

It is now commonly acknowledged that teaching in a learner’s local language is very beneficial (Bukenya, 2008). Therefore, the use of second language such as English as the language of instruction and examination at all levels of education is contributing to the problem of early school leaving. Bukenya, the UNEB secretary,
agrees with this position in his comments on the 2006 exam results, when he says; ‘poor communication skills arising from poor command of the English language and basic grammar’ is contributing to poor performance (2007, p. 2). The use of English creates many difficulties for both learners and teachers with a poor command of the English language. The effect is a limited grasp of the learning content, leading to poor performance in examinations and a greater likelihood of an early exit for such learners.

Although English is the official language of instruction, local languages are used in the first three years of schooling from Primary 1 to Primary 3, while English is taught as a subject. From Primary 4 onwards, the local language is taught as a subject and English becomes the language of instruction (Bukenya, 2008). Learners are free to take PLE examination in their ‘area languages’ (Majola, 2006). Candidates seem not to be aware of this or it is not a popular arrangement. This negligence limits the chance for good grades that could reduce the problem of early school leaving.

Unless local languages are mainstreamed as the language of daily administration and instruction, they will continue not to find favour in Uganda’s educational curriculum and English will continue to be the dominant language despite its disadvantages of adversely affecting performance in national exams.

THE NEW BUSINESS AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACT 2008

I have discussed above three attempts that were made in the history of Education in Uganda to skew it towards technical and agricultural education, and how these attempts were thwarted by popular demands for an academic curriculum (Ssekamwa, 2000). My view is that the teaching of technical and vocational skills could enable those who leave school early to find gainful employment that can benefit them, their families, communities and the economy. Therefore, a curriculum that balances both practical vocational skills training with academic learning could go a long way in addressing the problems of early school leavers.

Since 2008 another attempt is being made to introduce vocational and technical education. However, instead of agriculture, we have business studies. This new policy is the Business Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTVE) Act 2008. As mentioned above, this new BTVE Act resembles the Industrial Training Decree and Act of 1972. Given the history of such noble efforts to introduce vocational education in Uganda, I would like to treat the new Act with some measure of scepticism and subject it to a critical scrutiny to see if it has elements or properties which can make it overcome previous negative policy experiences.

One constant factor in the failure of previous vocational education policies was the popular demand for an academic curriculum. Because the vocational curriculum was not integrated into the existing system, both parents and learners discriminated against it. The curricula in most vocational training institutions did not provide a clear and discernable route towards a career, academic or professional growth, which meant that most learners saw it as condemning them to work of low status.
Some level of parental involvement and sensitisation could have gone a long way in overcoming the general rejection of such valuable curricular provisions. Furthermore, the incomes of people who passed through the vocational training colleges were generally low.

The BTVET Act states the following aims: ‘(a) to provide relevant knowledge, values and skills for purpose of academic progression and employment in the labour market; (b) to provide access to a large number of persons; (c) to improve the quality of BTVET; (d) to make BTVET affordable; (e) to enhance the productivity capabilities of the individual for employment and self employment’ (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008: Part II, Section 3). Objective (a), which provides for academic progression, could assist in overcoming one of the obstacles which hindered the old policy provisions and possibly encourage learners and their sponsors to espouse vocational training. Unfortunately, Section 5, which focuses on the scope and level of BTVET, limits progression to a diploma level rather than including the coveted degree level qualifications. There is no doubt that this provision will be a discouraging aspect of the Act if it is not clear to the public that a diploma can be used to gain admission to the coveted university degrees. Section 20 (5) is very clear on this: ‘The Act shall offer opportunity for students who excel at community polytechnics, vocational schools and training centres to proceed to the next level of learning’ (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008: Section 20 [5]). This provision needs to be broadcasted loudly to the public to overcome the perception that technical and vocational training terminates at lower levels of education. Objective (e) directly addresses the problem of early school leavers in terms of providing the learners with capabilities that will increase their employability and capacity for self-employment. In this, the BTVET Act and the Uganda Vocational Qualification Framework (UVQF) are providing alternative learning routes which could be readily taken by early school leavers at all levels of education. The other noble provision of the Act is the training levy and its management (Sections 22 to 25) is designed to support vocational training. This will help to fund the training and relieve the burden of fees from the already disadvantaged learners who drop out due to their inability to pay school fees.

The BTVET Act is a very dynamic and revolutionary policy which provides for a very flexible educational model, with easy entry, exit and re-entry. It also makes provision for the recognition of prior learning. In Section 6 it is stated that community polytechnics are to provide ‘low cost accessible training opportunities for primary leavers and other target groups such as our school children, unemployed and under employed persons’. (Ministry of Education and Sport, 2009; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008: Part II, Section 6). The Act directly mentions early school leavers, which shows that its designers were very cognisant of the problem in Uganda.

Under Section 9 in the BTVET Act all the technical and specialized training institutions were transferred from other ministries and consolidated under the Ministry of Education and Sports in 1998/99 to be managed by the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT). Other ministries that have a direct stake in the development of BTVET include the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries,

Although this remains to be seen, to some extent the consolidation of the vocational training programmes gives greater value to technical education in Uganda, which as we have seen was previously disparaged. It is expected that choosing such a form of education will no longer be seen as inevitably leading to failure.

Good as this policy is, the concern is that vocational education is still differentiated from the general educational system, which means it may still be shunned by the public. An integrated training provision and curriculum that balances both academic and practical vocational education would have been the most preferred option. While it was a good idea to combine BTVET institutions with the other professional training institutions under the control of other ministries, this also presents a danger, as it may draw attention away from non-formal and community-level vocational training which might be readily accepted by early school leavers.

THE UGANDA VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK

The Uganda Vocational Qualification Framework (UVQF), established under Part V, Sections 20 and 21 of the BTVET Act 2008, is an important aspect because it defines occupational standards with respect to the job market, relating the acquisition of a qualification to the current demand for positions in the job market. This means that students who are assessed and accredited under the UVQF will obtain qualifications that are immediately relevant to their field of employment, either as someone with employable skills or who can become self-employed. In this way the UVQF moves education away from knowledge-based training to competence-based education and training (CBET), thereby providing the grounding for a practical curriculum. The provision thus intends to bridge the worlds of training/education and work. Those trained under this arrangement should by no means be stranded in terms of job placement and means of personal livelihood. The UVQF also provides for the assessment and certification of skills acquired on the job, thus providing support for on the job training.

The assessment criteria under the UVQF are flexible and inclusive. However, the topic most visibly lacking in both the BTVEt Act and the UVQF is the question of the language of assessment. This leaves a gap in policy, which could easily lead to the exclusion of a particular group of people because the general mindset even among the beneficiaries is that any form of learning and therefore assessment should be done in English. I recommend that a clear and bold statement should be made indicating that the focus of the vocational qualification framework is job competences rather than language abilities to allow for assessment in the language that the learner has the best command. If such competences also require some level of English, then it should be treated as a subject and not as language of assessment.
A closer examination of Uganda’s education policies reveals that they ignore and contribute to the problem of early school leaving. Leaving school early would not be a problem if the education system provided fulfilment at all levels. In this chapter, I examined how public demands and expectations popularised educational policies that are defective and contributes to the problem of early school leaving in Uganda. As I have already noted above, policy pronouncements alone are not enough. All policies need to incorporate a serious attempt to make the public aware of the value and meaning of the policy as part of the policy process.

In most cases education policies are strong on access and weak on school retention rates and addressing the problem of early school leavers. Secondly, it is obvious that good policy proposals that could have limited the problem of early school leaving have always remained on paper because people were not made sufficiently aware of their importance. Such policy recommendations are also not supported by the general economic conditions in the country, which continued to favour academic curriculum and English as language of instruction over the other. Thirdly, the positive vocational education policies failed to take into account the policy implementation environment, which would have helped to anticipate the public’s reaction or response to some of the initiatives. Had this been built into the policy strategy it could have insulated the policy initiative against negative public response that has thus far led to policy failures.

Separating the practical curriculum from the general education system meant people were more inclined to be sceptical of its value and therefore avoiding it, as well as belittling those who undertook such training. Since the public has tended to shun the practical curriculum, it must be integrated into the existing academic curriculum and opened to all learners and not only to those regarded as weak.

A new and comprehensive attempt is being made under the BTMFT Act 2008 to change the situation. Although this policy adequately provides early school leavers with the opportunity to acquire skills and certificates recognizing their informally acquired skills, it remains to be seen if the policy will prioritise those elements which embrace the early school leavers. It also remains to be seen if it will overcome the difficulties which led to the failure of the 1972 Industrial Training Decree in Uganda.

Although it attempts to be all-inclusive, the UVQF still requires flexibility with respect to the language of assessment. An explicit statement should be made that assessment can be done in a local language of choice to ensure that language does not become an element of exclusion. This will open up access to all regardless of the language in which knowledge and/or skills are acquired.

On the basis of this case study of Uganda, I recommend that to achieve the EFA goals, education policies must be more comprehensive to take into account the policy implementation environment to ensure that such policies succeed in guiding education services provision in the country in ways that will lead to the attainment of the EFA goals. It is only then that the needs of all categories of learners are addressed, especially the needs of early school leavers.
REFERENCES


