



The Education Manager in the COVID-19 era

*Policy demands for effective response to COVID-19
and similar emergences*

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Preamble to the Policy Brief

On 26th November 2020, the Africa Leadership Institute (ALI) in Partnership with Uganda Management Institute (UMI) and Cabinet Secretariat conducted a virtual National Policy dialogue under the theme “the Education Manager in COVID-19 era”. The National Policy Forum is conducted quarterly with partial funding from the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF). The National Policy Forum convened under the umbrella of the Uganda Policy Development Management Forum (UPDMF) selected the topic because in October 2020, Government had issued guidelines on re-opening schools starting with candidate classes. Inside Parliament COVID-19 discussions had quickly shifted to discussions on schools re-opening. Therefore, the policy dialogue and this policy brief sought to enrich the discussions on managing the education sector in COVID-19 era. Below are extracts tracked from the Hansard of parliament to show how debate in parliament influenced the selection of the policy forum topic:

On October 6th 2020 during the time of raising matters of national importance, Hon. Maurice Kibalya (Bugabula County South) informed the house that Government was re-opening schools the next Thursday but some schools had been denied certificates for re-opening. He also observed that during the commemoration of the International Teachers’ Day on 5th October, he heard that parents would be compelled to pay UGX 240,000 for testing students and pupils before being allowed back to school. He wondered how parents who had failed to pay UGX 76000 for Primary Leaving Exams (PLE) would pay that amount for COVID-19 testing. Following his submission, the Rt. Honorable Speaker of Parliament Rebecca Kadaga asked if the Ministry of health that had given the guidelines to the education ministry would say something in absence for the education minister in the house. This prompted the Minister of State for Health (Primary Health Care) Hon. Dr. Joyce Moriku to make a statement as follows in verbatim:

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH (PRIMARY HEALTH CARE)

“Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank my colleague for raising this very important matter. It is true the country is set to receive the candidate classes at the different levels as directed by the Head of State. The Ministry of Health, together with the Ministry of Education and Sports came up with SOPs to keep our children safe while at school. I would like to make it clear that in the SOPs, there is no provision for testing all the candidates and the teachers for COVID-19. This, as said by my colleague, is not going to be the case. The SOPs basically include the following preparations to ensure children are safe. The school should have Temperature guns for screening the temperature; Hand washing facilities or sanitizers so that the children can keep their hands clean all the time and Spacing in the classrooms and dormitories. The SOPs put into consideration the fact that day schools will operate as day schools and boarding schools to operate as boarding schools. This is intended to ensure there is no much interaction between the day scholars and those who are in the boarding section. I want to make it clear - and this is in line with the spacing my colleague talked about - that in every school, there is a minimum of seven classrooms. These are meant to accommodate pupils from primary one up to primary seven in the case of primary schools. Right now, the classes that are reporting are basically for the candidates. Taking into consideration these classrooms, when well-spaced with the distance of two metres apart, schools should be in position to accommodate the candidate classes for the time being. That is what is involved

in the SOPs but emphasis is that there is going to be screening and no testing the school children. Thank you”.

On the same day, the matter attracted vibrant participation from MP Geoffrey Macho (NRM Busia Municipality), Asuman Basalirwa (JEEMA Bugiri Municipality) who questioned re-opening of schools without a statutory instrument, Anthony General William Byaruhanga and Hon. Esther Anyakun (Nakapiripiriti-NRM) who highlighted challenges of COVID and the State of Health facilities in Karamoja, MP Francis Mwijukye (FDC-Buhweju) and MP Julius Ochen.

Meanwhile on 1st October 2020, the first two hours of the plenary according to the Hansard were spent on studying by radio during COVID-19, distribution of Government procured study materials to students, and the plight of teachers in private schools as presented by the Leader of Opposition in Parliament Hon. Betty Aol Acan (Gulu Woman Representative -FDC).

Throughout the quarter, the issue of schools re-opening became a topical issue which motivated the Uganda Policy Management Development Forum to focus on education in COVID-19 era.



Students making their way home after schools were closed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Executive Summary

This policy brief highlights evidence-based demand for review of existing policy to redirect education sector on mitigation of institution management challenges introduced by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the phased opening of education institutions in Uganda and other COVID-19 mitigation measures in the education sector have been documented, they present largely as temporary interventions yet some inevitable day to day managerial and operational adjustments may remain permanent considerations for education managers and need long term policy guidance. Education managers in this context refers to technocrats at the ministry headquarters and managers of education institutions.

The conduct of business during the COVID-19 pandemic entailed closure and phased opening of education institutions, compliance with COVID-19 SOPs set by Ministry of Health (MoH) and elevation of online studies (ODEL) which have largely been construed as temporary interventions and minimal effort has been made to revisit policy to engrave some of these emerging practices introduced by COVID-19 in the policy framework. Notably, the sector was caught off guard during the COVID-19 pandemic with no contingent arrangements to address urgent budget needs. For most of the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic,

education institutions did not effectively adjust to the management needs introduced by the pandemic because the budget was not tailored to address contingencies. Although most institutions are adopting online learning, Uganda still grapples with poorly developed ICT infrastructure, high bandwidth costs, unreliable electricity supply, a general lack of resources to meet a broad spectrum of needs, significant barriers to access delivery platforms and of course the marginalized groups of society (Tumwesigye, 2020).

Even after one year of the pandemic, addressing contingencies in the budget, minimum qualifications, institutional facilitation, definition of partner roles and human resource mobilization remains incomplete, hence the suggestion to revisit the existing policy framework to make it COVID-19 and contingency sensitive not only in word but also in policy and action. Evidence has been compiled from a research study titled *The Education Manager in the COVID-19 era: Dilemma to Responsiveness and Continuity of Education*, commissioned by Uganda Management Institute in partnership with Africa Leadership Institute (ALI) to provide answers to emerging policy issues introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Staring into an uncertain future: students stand idle during the lockdown of schools. Poorly developed ICT infrastructure, high bandwidth costs, unreliable electricity supply, and a general lack of resources has made it hard for them to effectively participate.

Introduction

Like other sectors in Uganda, the education sector experienced operational adjustments with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic that have raised policy concerns. The ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has largely responded to standard operating procedures established by Ministry of Health (MoH) with minimal analysis of their potential impact on the current sector policy framework and actual impact on quality and mode of delivery of education services.

Some operational changes were made contingently without adjusting policy and critical analysis of their sustainability. For example HEIs and lower level institutions of learning including pre-primary schools introduced online studies under no compelling policy instruments. Although NCHE later outlined basic requirements for conduct of online studies for HEIs, detailed policy guidance is needed for education managers to implement sector-wide positions.

The need for private institutions of learning to obtain financial and other technical support to cope with the new culture of work and to remain relevant to the education sector is obvious but maybe overlooked in absence of compelling policy. The fact that issues as basic as survival of teachers during emergencies were not addressed in the pre-COVID-19 education sector policy speaks volumes about the policy gaps and calls for exhaustive review of existing policy to equip the sector with studied measures to manage contingencies in the category of COVID-19. The gist of this policy brief revolves around the likely 'pile-on effect' that may leave the threats posed by the pandemic in the sector unaddressed.



The Government of Uganda proposed homeschooling via radio and internet as an alternative for both primary and secondary students. Their is need for self-study materials for students, and training for teachers to facilitate radio classes in local languages.

Evidence-based policy intervention is thus needed to integrate contingency management in the mandate of the education managers, ensure equipment of education managers with financial, knowledge, budgets and human resource to manage disasters and other contingencies like epidemics, include management of structures to address inter-sectoral interventions, integration of private institutions staff in the public policy framework and ensure qualification of education managers and their staff to implement new policy guidelines.

Methodology

This paper was based on secondary research using electronic databases, reference harvesting, telephone interviews and discourse analysis triangulated to obtain balanced views on the most suitable way to revise policy and support the education sector in the era of COVID-19. Majorly, review summaries of the most recent research findings on COVID-19 pandemic was adopted. Together with integrative syntheses often used in collaborating information from different sources, we were able to capture and analyze the responsiveness of education managers. Emphasis was placed on the current state of the country's education system (using documentary evidence) in comparison to recent national and global updates of electronic/virtual learning. Since different countries have come up with different strategies, the paper largely relied on existing research to solve problems together, to collaborate and to communicate in different ways, to educate and be educated in a different way (Murray & Lopez, 2020). We rely on more recent studies that focused on educational technology and technology in education as a result of COVID-19 global crisis (Chintalapudi et al, 2020). The methodology used is being adopted by various researchers around the world as they attempt

to find alternative modes of teaching and learning for a paradigm shift from the face-to-face method to online learning teaching as supported by UNICEF (2020).

Key Findings/Assertions

In absence of definitive policy, education managers suffered policy, planning and monitoring uncertainties especially concerning quality of education service delivery during the COVID pandemic.

Inadequate resources and infrastructure amidst constrained Government releases to education institutions and collapse of business in private schools affected liquidity across the sector. Reports of schools changing business had been registered few months into the pandemic, largely attributed to loss of liquidity and absence of policy assurance of Government support.

The preparedness of the teaching staff as well as the administrative staff to manage the uncertainties in the environment is critical yet enabling resources like capitation grant remained constant or were withdrawn leaving education institutions to survive on their own.

There was visible absence of skill among responsible officers and teachers in utilization of available technology for management of contingent innovations like online teaching and the accompanying skills like cybergogy and heutagogy.

The education calendar and other education service delivery avenues were revisited with minimal consideration of operational pragmatic issues that may remain a permanent considerations for education institutions' planning and budgeting processes.



A member of staff has her temperature measured before entering a school in Kampala

Recommendations

Government of Uganda should review the existing policy framework to:

- 1) Integrate contingency management in the education policy framework
- 2) Revise the sector budget to allow ministries an allocation for response to potential contingencies
- 3) Integrate training for education managers in management of disasters and other contingencies in the education curriculum
- 4) Systematically integrate innovations like online teaching in the teacher training curricula to ensure coverage of subjects like cybergogy, heutagogy, online marketing and collaborative partnership are utilized to streamline the teaching process during contingency periods.
- 5) Revisit and specify role of stakeholders in the Education process like Ministry of Health, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Security whose mandate in the education process has been widened by COVID-19.
- 6) Provide for regular conduct of scientific analysis of education system's capacity to accommodate emerging demands of service delivery



Children listen attentively to their teacher while observing SOPs by wearing face masks and observing atleast 2 metre spacing.



The President and the First Lady Janet Museveni-Minister of Education and Sports moving to address the nation on education in the COVID-19 Era.

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Leading by example: Uganda's First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports Janet Museveni receives COVID-19 vaccination at State House in Nakasero, Kampala, Uganda, on March 27, 2021. It has been recommended that all teachers be vaccinated before schools can be re-opened. Unfortunately, only 110,000 of the targeted 550,000 teachers have been vaccinated. Over 80 percent of the teachers are yet to receive a single dose of vaccine. It has also been recommended that all non-teaching staff and learners aged 18 years and above in the schools should also be vaccinated.

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