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Evaluating the Factors Contributing to Poor Academic Performance of Primary School Students in Hard-to-Reach Areas in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the factors contributing to poor academic performance of primary schools in hard-to-reach areas in Uganda. The study revealed that absenteeism, inadequate instructional materials, lack of motivation, lateness, ignorance, etc. played a big role in poor academic performance in Uganda. Based on the observations, the article calls for the government to provide sufficient and appropriate instructional materials to the country's hard-to-reach schools in order to improve learning. Furthermore, it's crucial to educate parents about the value of education, ensuring they consistently send their children to school. Children should attend school, and educators should receive additional training, such as refresher courses, to enhance their skills and promote better performance. Similarly, the government should construct comfortable school staff houses so that teachers from far away can reside within the school. Furthermore, bye-laws should require any school-aged child found at home to attend school, and parents should be held accountable for their children's absences. Furthermore, the government should construct more spacious classrooms in schools and dormitories for distant learners. Finally, the government should review the teachers' salaries to enhance their motivation. The teachers in these schools should receive hard-to-reach allowances.

Keywords: Academic performance, Government, Hard to reach areas, Primary school, Students.

INTRODUCTION

International research links the low socioeconomic background of learners to poor performance in primary schools. Research also indicates that urban students typically outperform their rural counterparts [1]. Education does not exist in a vacuum; it reflects the broad social, economic, and political structure of the country it serves. In South Africa, the previous black education system was closely linked to the broader development program and ongoing political solutions. Politics and education coexist in a symbiotic relationship, as politics always shapes education. Some argue that these differences in academic performance mirror social realities like poverty, political issues, and socio-economic challenges [2]. According to Okwi et al. [3], poverty has spatial, racial, and gender dimensions. Provinces with a high rural population, predominantly black, experience concentrations of poverty. Their high poverty levels stem from their high rates of illiteracy and unemployment. These factors continue to exacerbate the issues that lead to children performing poorly in school.

There is a significant disparity in accessibility and working conditions across various districts in Uganda. This has prompted the Ministry of Education and Sports to dispatch a number of experts who have undertaken a survey of all the districts in Uganda. The survey, however, indicates that some districts are inaccessible as well as having high levels of poverty, hostility, and illiteracy [4].

The term 'hard-to-reach secondary school' is a phrase used to describe communities that struggle to access healthcare, education and other basic services [5]. Hard-to-reach areas are characterized by their remoteness, insecurity, poor infrastructure, prolonged conflicts, and proximity to water bodies or mountains. The eastern part is one such place. These areas are characterised by a prevalence of poverty, high illiteracy, and high school dropout rates. The poor science achievement results in these hard-to-reach schools are indicative of overall poor academic performance [6].

In 2007, Uganda became the first sub-Saharan country to start a scheme of universal secondary education (USE). This scheme has considerably increased public secondary school enrolments, especially for girls from poor

households. However, due to failure rates, the number of girls who reach university to pursue science careers has remained minimal. To avoid this, the government adds points to every female student on the weighing system, but, alas, the ratio is never in any of the physical science courses at any university [7]. It is for this worrying and dwindling performance that this article evaluates the factors contributing to poor academic performance in hard-to-reach areas of Uganda.

Factors contributing to poor academic performance

Self-concept and self-identity

Success in school often correlates with a positive self-concept and identity. Research generally indicates that African American learners are not as confident as those from other racial or ethnic groups. As a result, they have more difficulty establishing ethnic and tribal identity and pride in their African American heritage. They feel despaired, disillusioned, alienated, frustrated, hopeless, powerless, rejected, and estranged. These are all elements of a negative view of oneself [8].

Masudi and Silaji [9] observed that conditions at home help foster or block school success. Some of these home conditions include: close family relationships that help build positive self-concept; helping children read at home; parental involvement in school; having high expectations for children's schooling; and clear rules and standards for their behavior.

Parents' educational level

The learner's perception of family support directly affects performance, while the mother's level of education does so indirectly. Learners with inadequately literate parents face disadvantages, as they must now help their children with their home-based assignments and projects. Kahunzire et al. [10] revealed that one's results and expectations for the future are better if one belongs to a higher social ladder. Research conducted in America equally indicates a high correlation between low school achievement and socio-economic background, where most of the researched families are classified in the lower economic brackets, with the highest poverty and unemployment rates. Inherent inferiority, characterized by a high rate of illiteracy, poor hygiene, and a lack of middle-class child-rearing practices, particularly among parents, legitimizes education failure [11].

Unemployment of parents

Nutritional deficiencies in early childhood, where there is a chronic deficiency of iron (leading to anaemia), zinc, and vitamin intake, are associated with poor cognition in later years, independent of psychosocial adversity. Feeding schemes could help curb such problems because learners would be able to eat a balanced diet at school, thereby improving their academic performance [12].

Marital status of parents

Choi and Marks [13] observed that marital status—being either single, married, divorced, or widowed—and the parents' social class in terms of their income categories (lower, middle-, or upper-income class) all have an impact on learners' self-concept and learning process. Separation and divorce often carry a stigma that negatively impacts the learner's academic performance. The uncertainty results in undue anxiety among young people. A discussion of family problems between parents and their children will reduce such uncertainty, and they will eventually adapt to the situation.

Unequal distributions of facilities and resources

Depending on the extent and quality of education, education promotes human capital as an asset with greater or lower rates of return. Generally, some of the factors contributing to learners' poor performance are a lack of resources and poor facilities in most schools, but especially in rural areas. Some of the schools in rural areas are in a worse state of disrepair than those in urban areas. The problem regarding the unequal distribution of resources between provinces and rural and urban areas is still intact [14].

Poor facilities

According to Adedeji and Campell [15], thousands of schools still have poor physical infrastructure, and many are dilapidated, dangerous, and unfit for human habitation. Often, these schools lack water and sanitation facilities, which not only hinders the school's teaching and learning activities but also poses a health risk to both learners and educators. This could influence the absenteeism of both learners and educators. There is a strong relationship between learner performance and the quality of the facilities available to learners.

Solutions to causes of poor academic performance

According to Egbe [16], the core business of any education or school system is to deliver quality education and ensure that pupils reach their potential. We should equip head teachers and school managers with the critical knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to enhance performance and positively influence quality at the school level. The author further argued that achieving quality performance requires harnessing the participation and partnerships of various stakeholder groups. The coming together of parents, teachers, pupils, PTAs, and local leaders can bring about better-quality performance. Strong partnerships between these actors and the educational managers themselves are the foundation for improving quality education.

CONCLUSION

The study's goal was to identify the factors that contribute to poor performance in Uganda's hard-to-reach schools. The study revealed that absenteeism, inadequate instructional materials, lack of motivation, lateness, ignorance, etc. played a big role in poor academic performance in Uganda. Based on the observations, the article calls for the government to provide sufficient and appropriate instructional materials to the country's hard-to-reach schools in order to improve learning.

Recommendations

It's crucial to educate parents about the value of education, ensuring they consistently send their children to school. Children should attend school, and educators should receive additional training, such as refresher courses, to enhance their skills and promote better performance. Similarly, the government should construct comfortable school staff houses so that teachers from far away can reside within the school. Furthermore, bye-laws should require any school-aged child found at home to attend school, and parents should be held accountable for their children's absences. Furthermore, the government should construct more spacious classrooms in schools and dormitories for distant learners. Finally, the government should review the teachers' salaries to enhance their motivation. The teachers in these schools should receive hard-to-reach allowances.

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