

AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACTS OF THE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY
EDUCATION POLICIES ON EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCES IN EAST AFRICA: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF UGANDA'S UPE AND KENYA'S FPE

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Abstract

Since cognitive skills have been shown to be more important than years of schooling in cross-country economic growth models, it is now widely accepted that mere school attendance is not an effective measure of future earnings at both individual and national levels. Several studies have assessed the impacts of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policies in the developing countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), mainly focusing on the enrolment benefits. Very little attention in the literature has been devoted to assessing, at the pupil-level, the actual learning attained from public school classrooms. Also, internationally valid empirical studies addressing learning attainment in SSA currently are still lacking. This study utilizes an internationally standardized and comparable dataset from the Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) to measure the learning impacts of the UPE interventions in Uganda and Kenya. It, further, assesses the pathways to the learning outcomes and the differential impacts of the interventions across gender and socioeconomic statuses. We utilize the grade six pupils' reading and math test scores from the SACMEQ region of fifteen countries to estimate the impacts of the UPE Quality Enhancement Initiatives (QEIs) in Uganda and the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in Kenya. The study finds significant declines in test scores for both subjects in both countries' public schools. In Uganda, since test scores for private schools declined more than they declined in public schools, the intervention was associated with improvements for both subjects although the overall impacts for mathematics were not statistically significant. The

FPE policy in Kenya was associated with declines in public school pupils' achievements for both subjects and private schools' test scores improved greatly. Significant gender and socioeconomic learning impact differences were found for both countries. Poor learning outcomes were observed in Ugandan rural schools – especially for girls - and in Kenya's urban schools – for boys. Grade six teacher effort, frequency of school inspections, teacher absenteeism, the proportion of open-air classes and local community involvement in school operations were found to be the important channels explaining the observed test score changes.