

# To What Extent Has Girl Child Education Been Promoted by The Government of Uganda at Secondary School Level?

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**Abstract:** This paper presents an analysis of girl child education in Uganda at secondary school level, as a result of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Since Uganda is a signatory to this convention, it put in place many policies so as to end whatever was perceived as discriminatory against women. In the Education sector, policies and programmes have been put in place to promote girl child education. These include Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE), The National Strategy for Girls' Education (NSGE), The Promotion of Girls' Education (PGE) Scheme, The Equity in the Classroom (EIC) programme, the Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK), The Classroom Construction Grant (CCG) programme, The Gender desk in the Ministry of Education and Sports headquarters, The Girls' Education Movement in Africa (GEM), Child Friendly School programme, Focusing Resources for Effective School Health (FRESH), among others. This paper analysed girl child education by basing on three questions namely: What is the Enrolment level of girls at secondary school level in Uganda?; what is the completion rate of girls at secondary school level in Uganda; and what is the academic performance of girls at secondary school level in Uganda?. The analysis was made on the data from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2020, a government body which produces quarterly and annual statistical reports for all the ministries in Uganda. The findings were that the enrolment, retention and performance of girls in Uganda's secondary schools is good and does not differ significantly from that of the boys. However, in rural areas, some girls are married off at an early age and hence drop out of school and in some instances, their performance is poor. It is therefore suggested that parents, religious leaders, non-government organizations, as well as the government do more to educate the masses on the dangers of early marriages and school drop-out so that all girls who enroll in school can finish.

**Key words:** Girl child education; Promoted; Government of Uganda

## I. INTRODUCTION

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women globally were facing discrimination and little efforts were made to liberate them. In Africa for example, they were taken as property of men and a man was free to marry as many wives as he wished and in some societies like Ankole of Uganda, a married woman was not supposed to reject the sexual advances from the brothers of her husband or even from her father-in-law. The situation was not different from that in

Saudi Arabia during the Jahilliya period (before the advent of the Islamic faith there). Women were mistreated, were forced in marriage and could be divorced at their husbands' wish. Generally, women did not have a say in the social, political, cultural and economic spheres of life (Byaruhanga, 2019).

For many years, girls did not enjoy the privilege of stepping in school. Even with the opening of girls' schools such as Gayaza Junior and Gayaza High School (1905), Mt. St. Mary's College Namagunga (1942), many girls were unable to go to school; largely because of prevailing unfavorable societal cultural attitudes of educating girls. It was a time of strict cultural observance that girls were supposed to be homemakers, to kneel before men, to be married off at adolescent age and to produce children. It was worse for the daughters of peasants. Though schools had come, at first the schools were reserved for the daughters of chiefs so that the educated sons of chiefs could marry educated women from rich families so as to maintain the status quo (SSekamwa, 1999).

The first attempts at promoting girl child education in Uganda were made by the 1963 Castle Commission. The Commission highlighted the need to expand girl' education in the country. However, very little progress was made as the Government Education Plan (1971/2– 1975/6) formed to implement the suggestions did not have the manpower and facilities to accomplish the job. Serious reforms to boost girl-child education resumed with the Government Education Policy Review Committee of 1987 which sought to among other issues, address inequalities in Uganda's education system. The subsequent 1991 publication of a Government White Paper on Education set out benchmarks against which important programmes to attain parity in education would be implemented. One of the key elements of this White Paper was the need to democratise education; to provide equal opportunities to Ugandan children regardless of age, gender, religion and other identities. These reforms led to the introduction of Affirmative Action in University admission, ensuring that all female applicants get 1.5 points added onto their university entry marks. In 1997, Universal Primary Education was introduced and in 2007, Universal Secondary Education (USE) was introduced, thus offering more opportunities for girls to attend school. Despite these efforts,

girls still lag behind in education partly due to factors which are social and cultural (FAWEU, 2010).

The government of the republic of Uganda put in place legal mechanisms to protect the rights of women in Uganda, such as the right to education. This was embedded in the 1995 national constitution. Since education is a right which woman, like their male counterparts are supposed to enjoy, this paper examines girl child education in Uganda. Specifically, the paper addresses the following:

- i. Enrolment of girls at secondary school level in Uganda
- ii. Completion rates of girls at secondary school level in Uganda; and
- iii. The academic performance of girls at secondary school level in Uganda.

The reasons for such trends have also been explored. Using documentary review, the findings are presented.

#### *Problem Statement*

Many policies have been put in place to eliminate the education-related imbalance between men and women in Uganda, such as the The National Strategy for Girls Education (NSGE), The Universal Primary Education (UPE), Univesal Secondary Education (USE), Primary Education Reform, among others, Ugandan girls' right to education is not yet a success story. For instance, The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, did in 2019, report that more than 700,000 girls in Uganda between 6 and 12 have never attended school. In addition, around half of girls between the ages of 15 to 24 are illiterate and four in five girls don't attend high school.

Some parents 'sell off' their young daughters into marriage, others do not provide lunch to their children. In other instances, female school students are impregnated by men (sometimes by their fathers, uncles and other relatives), and hence drop out of school. Others hold traditional beliefs that a menstruating girl is not supposed to pass through cross-roads, or else she can fail to produce, can get miscarriages, and can fail to be married. Because of this, some of them do not attend school during the days they are in periods. To make matters worse, some girls spend more than three days in menstruation (UWEZO, 2016). This paper therefore examines the status of girl child education in Uganda, and the reasons for that kind of trend.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before the country called Uganda was formed by the British in 1894, what existed were the independent self-governing kingdoms and chiefdoms, such as Buganda, Tooro, Ankole, Bunyoro, Busoga, Acholi etcetera. Women were seen as men's property who had to be married off in exchange for huge bride wealth like cows, goats, money, cocks, and bark clothes. They were not highly valued since they produced children for other families, not the families of their fathers.

The boys on the other hand enlarged their fathers' clans through the children they produced; they also offered protection to their fathers' families thus controlling or preventing cattle thefts. Using spears, bows and arrows, they also protected their communities/ethnic groups against external attacks, hence controlling the inter-tribal wars, as the case was between Buganda and Bunyoro, Ankole and Bunyoro, etcetera. Given this cultural perspective which was prevailing in all regions of Uganda by the 20th century, when formal education was introduced in Uganda by the Christian missionaries in the 19th century, emphasis was on educating boys (Kayindu, 2018).

During adolescence, girls were subjected to the cultural practices as per their societal cultures, many of which were degrading. These included among others, female circumcision whereby the woman's genitalia were cut so as to reduce their sexual drive, as the case was among the Sebei ethnic group (in current Northern region of Uganda). On the other hand, in other societies like Buganda, Ankole, Toro, and Bunyoro, girls were subjected to elongating the labia as a way of preparing them for marriage, something which was considered prestigious among women. Elongating the labia was done for over eight months and it was a very painful experience. Despite this, it was highly promoted (Kayindu & Kamulegeya, 2018).

Against this background, the abrogated 1962 constitution of Uganda emphasised equality between men and women but not much was done to implement it. Though the first attempts at promoting girl child education in Uganda were made by the 1963 Castle Commission by highlighting the need to expand girl's education in the country, very little progress was made as the Government Education Plan (1971/2–1975/6) formed to implement the suggestions did not have the manpower and facilities to accomplish the job. Secondly, the 1970s and 1980s were years of political turmoil in Uganda, hence women were not fully accorded equal rights with men. When the National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power in 1986, it attempted to change the status of women's rights through the 1995 national constitution (Senkaaba, 2018, as cited in Byaruhanga, 2019). Thus, Article 32 (5) of Uganda's 1995 constitution states, "Without prejudice to article 32 of this Constitution, women shall have the right to affirmative action for the purpose of redressing the imbalances created by history, tradition or custom".

Uganda is a signatory to a number of international commitments on education, for example the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Education For All (EFA) Goals, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Education For All (EFA) Goals particularly goal 5 aims at eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education and achieving gender equality in education. (Kataike, 2018).

Despite all this, girl child lags behind as compared to boys in the education sector. Some of the girls who enroll in secondary schools do not complete their education, girls' drop-out rates are high. According to a 2010 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's Global monitoring report on marginalization, only 31% of all girls that enrolled for secondary education were able to complete O' level education compared to 39% for boys. 31.1% of the girls were able to join A-level compared to 41.3%. Early pregnancies, poor sanitation facilities in schools and absence of support mechanisms especially for girls have contributed a lot to girls dropping out of school. The situation is often worse in rural areas (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Many policies have been put in place to promote the rights of the girl child in the field of education. These include among others, Universal Secondary Education, The National Strategy for Girls Education (NSGE), The Promotion of Girls Education (PGE) Scheme, The Equity in the Classroom (EIC) programme, the Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK), The Classroom Construction Grant (CCG) programme, The Gender desk in the Ministry of Education and Sports headquarters, The Girls' Education Movement in Africa (GEM), Child Friendly School programme, Focusing Resources for Effective School Health (FRESH), among other programmes. Despite these programmes, girls, compared to their male counterparts, still lag behind in terms of access to secondary schools, academic performance, and retention; some do not complete the six-year cycle of secondary education, during the course of studying, some of them do not attend school during the days they are in periods, while others perform poorly (UWEZO, 2016; Byaruhanga, 2019). Though the policies and efforts are in place, their implementation in Uganda needs to be analysed using empirical evidence from government publications, academic dissertations and newspaper articles, hence the current study.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Using documentary review, such as reviewing related studies, journal articles and the government official documents, the data was analysed as per the themes of the study. In Uganda's case, secondary school education is made up of two sections or levels, namely, Ordinary level which takes four years from Senior one to Senior four (S.1-S.4), as well as Advanced Level which takes two years from Senior Five to Senior Six (S.5-S.6). The students sit for national examinations at the end of S.4 and then at the end of S.6. Those who pass S.4 can join S.5 or tertiary institutions, while those who pass S.6 can proceed to universities or to the tertiary institutions.

### IV. FINDINGS

#### i. Enrolment of girls at secondary school level

On this research objective, it was found out that girls' enrolment in secondary schools in Uganda was high, as shown in table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Enrolment of Girls and Boys in Secondary Schools, 2013 – 2017

Indicator	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Gross Enrolment rate	29	30	25	27	25
Net Enrolment Ratio	26	26	22	24	22
Student Teacher Ratio	22	22	22	22	21
Student Classroom Ratio	55	50	52	51	49
Enrolment (000)	1,362	1,391	1,284	1,457	1,371
Male	727	738	675	765	716
Female	635	653	609	692	654
% Annual change in enrolment	8.9	2.1	-7.7	13.5	-5.9
Number of Schools	2,838	2,950	2,695	3,070	2,995
Number of Teachers	61,505	63,957	58,051	66,542	64,966
Number of classrooms	28,242	27,706	25,888	27,239	27,771
Population (13-18 years, 000's)	-	5,264	5,289	5,510	5,716
Male	-	2,644	2,614	2,738	2,854
Female	-	2,601	2,675	2,7	

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2020). *Statistical abstract*, pg 24.

Based on table 1.1, the trend of girls' enrolment in secondary schools in Uganda has kept increasing over the years. For instance, in 2014, girls' enrolment increased to 653,000, from 635,000 of the previous year 2013, hence (2.8%). However, in 2017, there was a decline of 5.5%, as 654,000 girls were admitted compared to 692,000 admitted in the previous year 2016.

It is also realized that, the rate of enrolment of girls is slightly lower than that of boys though the difference is small. For instance, whereas there was an increase of 1.5% in the enrolment of boys in 2014, the difference between girls' enrolment and that of boys was small since for the girls it was 2.8% yet for the boys it was 1.5%. Even in 2017, boys' enrolment decreased to 716,000 compared to the enrolment of 2016, ie 765,000. Therefore, there was 6.4% decrease for boys from 2016 to 2017, yet for girls it was a decrease of 5.5%.

All in all, girls' enrolment in secondary schools in Uganda is good since the number of girls admitted does not differ much from that of the boys.

#### ii. Completion rates of girls at secondary school level

Ordinary Level Secondary (S1-S4) completion rate is computed as the total number of students in the fourth grade

(S4) of secondary education divided by the total number of children of official completion age (16 years). It captures the transition rate from primary to secondary schooling. Table 1.2 shows that the transition rate to Senior Five (S5) in 2017 was 25 percent, a decrease from 30 percent in 2016. In both instances, males were more likely to complete S.4 as well as transition to S.5 compared to their female counterparts, as shown in table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Completion and Transition rates to S.5, 2013-2017

SEX	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Senior 4 Completion rate</b>					
Boys	36.7	36.4	36.4	39.6	36.2
Girls	33.8	33.9	35.9	36.0	33.5
Total	35.3	35.8	36.2	37.8	34.8
<b>Transition rate to S5</b>					
Boys	37.0	33.6	28.1	31.0	28.4
Girls	27.0	25.9	21.4	29.4	21.0
Total	32.0	30.0	25.0	30	

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2020). *Statistical abstract*, pg 26.

### iii. The academic performance of girls at secondary school level

On this research objective, it was found out that the academic performance of girls as measured basing on their results in the national examinations, is good, as shown in table 1.3.

Table 2.2.11: Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) results by grade and sex, 2019

Indicator	Male	Female	Total	
Percentage	Numbers			
Students who registered	49.9	50.1	100.0	337,720
Students Who Sat for UCE	49.9	50.1	100.0	333,060
Students who didn't sit	50.4	49.6	100.0	4,660
Students who passed	50.5	49.5	100.0	306,925
Division 1	59.3	40.7	100.0	27,842
Division 2	55.8	44.2	100.0	58,575
Division 3	51.4	48.6	100.0	77,289
Division 4	46.1	53.9	100.0	143,219
Division U	43.6	56.4	100.0	26,135
Division X	50.4	49.6	100.0	4,660
Pass Rate	93%	91%	92%	
Performance Index*	47%	41%	44%	

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2020). *Statistical abstract*, pg 25.

Based on table 1.3, the majority of the students, both boys and girls (143,219) who sat for UCE in 2019 passed in Division 4. There was significant decrease in the number of the students that failed (DIV.U) UCE from 42,324 in 2018 to 26,135 in 2019. The performance index increased to 44 percent in 2019 as compared to 41.4 percent in 2018. As for girls in the year 2019, the percentage of those who passed Division 1,2,3 and 4 were 40.7%, 44.2%, 48.6% and 53.9% respectively. Only 49.6% passed in Division X, while 56.4% passed in Division U. The implication of this is that girls' performance is good. Imagine in 2019, their pass rate was 91% though it was slightly lower than that of the boys (93%).

## V. DISCUSSION

### i. Enrolment of Girls at Secondary School Level

It has been realized that girls' enrolment in secondary schools in Uganda is high especially after the introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007. Prior to that, though girls' enrolment in secondary schools was emphasized by the government as well as by all religious groups, that is, the Church and the Muslim Community, not many parents could afford. This agrees with Kayindu (2017) who asserted that before the 1990s, many girls were not taken to school due to a number of factors, such as the cultural belief that girls were producing girls for other clans, not for the father's clan. Other factors were poverty, hence marrying them off to get bride wealth. The fear of early pregnancy "wasting" the father's money was also a factor. Hence, the current trends in girl child education prove that the fight for women's rights has started producing fruits probably with a realization that educated women can contribute significantly to the development of the nation and many times they are very helpful to their parents than even the boys (Kataike, 2018; Byaruhanga, 2019).

Indeed, what is asserted by Kayindu, Nakiyingi and Nkwanga (2020) is true that girl child education has gained momentum even in the rural areas as School Management Committees, despite sometimes being rubberstamps of some headteachers, usually urge parents to take children to school. They also urge headteachers not to expell students over small issues like torn uniforms, late coming, etcetera.

### ii. Completion Rates of Girls at Secondary School Level

Based on the data available as presented, though some girls drop out of school before completing the six years of secondary education cycle, many girls do finish. The possible explanation for this is the free education offered in Uganda at secondary school level in many public schools. Though these schools are not evenly distributed, their presence in each of the county of Uganda has given an opportunity to Ugandan girls to access secondary education and finish. This is in agreement with the study Byaruhanga (2019) conducted in Hoima district in which he found out that many parents had understood the value of ensuring that their daughters do

complete the secondary education cycle. Though Kataike (2018)'s study revealed that the drop out of girls from school in Busoga sub-region of Eastern Uganda was high, he did not rule out the fact that many other girls were completing the secondary education cycle. Indeed, as Kayindu, Asimwe, Bisaso and Nakiyingi (2020) contend, teachers have a role to play in the completion rates of students. If teachers are well remunerated, they become motivated to guide and counsel students which can cause them to appreciate completing secondary school level. A related view is held by Turyamureeba, Kayindu and Bisaso (2020). In the same vein, school management plays a role in the retention of children in schools. Well managed schools do retain children than their counterparts which are poorly managed. This is because, in well managed schools teachers pay attention to individual students, they are always present at school, they guide and counsel students, they fight indiscipline among students. These factors, coupled with good teaching, can go a long way in causing students to perform well and to be retained in school (Kayindu, Tindi, Garba & Gwokyalaya, 2017).

Based on documentary review, by 2017, the national secondary school Net Enrolment Rate was 44 percent, which implies that only 44 percent of students who were expected to be in secondary school (13-18years) were actually enrolled in secondary school. By 2017, the population aged 19years, which is expected to have completed upper secondary education or senior six and attained Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE), the net completion rate for upper secondary education in Uganda for the population aged 19 years was six percent. The net completion rates for the females (6.4%) were more than for the males (5.7%). Disaggregation by residence indicated that the net Secondary completion rate among the urban population was 7 times more than that among the rural population. By sub regions, Karamoja (2%) had the lowest and Kampala (29%) had the highest net completion rates of senior six for the population aged 19 years among all the regions. Nevertheless, apart from Kampala, Central 1 and Central 2 regions, all the remaining regions had a lower proportion of the population aged 19 years who completed upper secondary education (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2017). This shows that girl child education still faces challenges despite the several government interventions.

### *iii. The Academic Performance of Girls at Secondary School Level*

The analysed data reveals that though some girls perform poorly, many others perform well and there is generally no significant difference between girls' performance and that of their male counterparts. This can be attributed to the efforts by the government of Uganda to introduce Senior Women Teachers in all secondary schools throughout the country. Among other things, these women guide girls, counsel them and urge them never to perceive themselves as inferior. Indeed, as Kayindu (2017) asserts, the women's liberation movement has caused women to be at the same footing with

men. Nevertheless, in rural schools, girls as well as boys usually perform poorly in the national examinations as some girls dodge lessons due to lack of menstruation gears during their menstruation periods. Others hold traditional beliefs that a menstruating girl/woman does not cross the cross-road or else she can become barren. There is also a belief in Bunyoro and Buganda that if one lands on a pad used by a girl during menstruation and drops it in one of the holes found on a dormant anti-hill (locally known as *Ekiswa Ekyafulukwa*), that girl can fail to get a man to marry her, can get misfortunes in life and can have miscarriages when she becomes pregnant either after getting married or before (Byaruhanga, 2019). Such traditional beliefs at times cause girls to perform poorly in school since they tend to dodge lessons when they are in periods. The findings in the analysed data are in line with the findings of the study carried out in Luweero district by Asmaa, Sole-Gaite and Kayindu (2021) which unearthed that in cases where parents play their roles well, their children perform well academically unlike their counterparts who ignore their parental roles and think that their daughters are mature enough to decide for themselves what is better for them.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the analysed data from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2020, a government body which produces quarterly and annual statistical reports for all the ministries in Uganda, it is revealed that the enrolment, retention and performance of girls in Uganda's secondary schools is good and does not differ significantly from that of the boys. Before the 1980s, parents preferred educating boys to girls but now they seem to have realized the need of educating girls equally like boys. Nevertheless, the documentary review reveals that in rural areas, some girls are married off at an early age and hence drop out of school and in some instances, girls' performance is poor. It is therefore suggested that parents, religious leaders, non-government organizations, as well as the government do more to educate the masses on the dangers of early marriages and school drop-out so that all girls who enroll in school can finish the six years of secondary school level.

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