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**An Investigation into the Relationship Between the
1997 Universal Primary Education (UPE) Policy and
Regional Poverty and Educational Inequalities in
Uganda (1997-2007)**

John Ekaju

**Thesis Presented for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
In the School of Education
THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

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ABSTRACT

Past research has addressed the disparities in educational achievement for primary seven school leavers in Uganda but it did not take into account the multidimensional perspectives: those on poverty (as reported by the poor) and on educational inequalities between and within regions, particularly with regard to the impacts of the 1997 Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy. The central question for this enquiry was: whether the UPE policy reforms have eradicated the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda given the evidence of a decade of UPE implementation (1997-2007). Five research questions arose: (1) What is the state of the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda a decade after the launching of the 1997 UPE policy? (2) What are the perceptions of Primary leavers and adults on UPE and NFE and the effects of these interventions in reducing poverty and educational inequalities? (3) Is there evidence that UPE is helping poor people to escape from poverty? (4) How are poor people in Uganda socially constructed? What is the impact of the social construction of UPE on the learning outcomes of learners across the three different locations? and (5) How can UPE be meaningfully designed to help reduce regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda?

The field data was collected during a year-long (June 2007 - May 2008) qualitative, field-based study of 16 Primary school graduates and pioneer beneficiaries of the 1997 UPE policy and of 34 adults - the latter identified by the nature of their role and position in relation to these UPE graduates. Broadly, the typology provides the central framework for a comparative study, through the diverse perspectives of Primary leavers, head teachers, education officials, community leaders and Education Executive Committee members and others chosen through a purposive sampling strategy, in three distinct education settings (the City, the peri-urban Municipality and the Village) using face-to-face interviews, focus groups and participatory techniques. The research adopted an integrated approach using critical ethnography, social constructionist and the emancipatory paradigms for triangulation. The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ II 2005 - Byamugisha and Ssenabulya) Survey on Numeracy and Literacy levels for Grade 6 in Uganda provided data to validate the findings from the integrated account and to support the thesis that UPE has not reduced regional inequality in Uganda.

The study identified the following gaps for further research: (a) gathering robust disaggregated data to address exclusion - gender, disability, socio-economic status, ethnic origin and place of residence; (b) an investigation of the most practical and cost-effective approach to meet the education aspirations of the disadvantaged school-age out-of-school children and youths; (c) a study of the impact of the language policy implemented through the thematic curriculum in the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic classrooms, (d) an investigation of the high attrition rates and the attribution of poor quality of UPE to teachers, and (e) a clarification of the meaning of UPE in Uganda from an inclusive and an equity perspective.

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John Ekaju

Glasgow, 2 May 2011.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis does not include work forming part of a thesis presented successfully for another degree. I declare that the thesis represents my own work except where referenced to others.

Place: The University of Glasgow

Signature:

Date: 2 May 2011

Name: John Ekaju

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ACRONYMS USED

ABEK	Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja
ADB	Africa Development Bank
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
ADB	Asia Development Bank
AED	Academy for Educational Development
AMREF	African Medical and Research Foundation
ARLPI	Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative
BAAP	British Academy of African Partnership
BEUPA	Basic Education for Urban Poverty Areas
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CATI	Community Accountability and Transparency Initiative
CBE	Complementary Basic Education
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CHANCE	Child-centred Alternation, Non-formal Community Based Education
COPE	Complementary Opportunity for Primary Education
CPT	Customised Performance Targets
CRADALL	Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning

DEO	District Education Officer
DFID	Department for International Development
ECA	Economic Commission of Africa
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EEC	Executive Education Committee
EFA	Education for All
EFAG	Education Funding Agencies Group
ELSE	Empowering Lifelong Skills Education
EPRC	Education Policy Review Commission
ESIP	Education Sector Investment Plan
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan
ESA	Education Standards Agency
ESSAPR	Education and Sports Sector Annual Performance Report
FAL	Functional Adult Literacy
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FPE	Free Primary Education
GoU	Government of Uganda
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries

IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department
KCC	Kampala City Council
LC	Local Council
LRA	Lords Resistance Army
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MFPED	Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development
MS Uganda	Danish Association for International Co-operation
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NAADS	The National Agricultural Advisory Services
NCDC	National Curriculum and Development Centre
NFE	Non-formal Education
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Fund
OECD	Organisation of European Economic Development
PA	Poverty Assessment
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan

PETDP	Primary Education and Teacher Development Project
PLE	Primary Leaving Examination
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessments
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRDP	Peace Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan
PTA	Parents Teachers Association
PTC	Primary Teachers' College
QEI	Quality Enhancement Initiative
REFLECT	Regenerated Freirian Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
SACCOs	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations
SACMEQ	The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality II
SMC	School Management Committee
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SUPER	Support to Primary Education Reform
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
UACE	Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics

UCE	Uganda Certificate of Education
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEB	Uganda National Examination Board
UNESCO	United Nations Education and Scientific Cultural Organisation
UNHS	Uganda National Household Survey
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Education Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
UPPAP	Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WCEFA	World Conference on Education for All
WCRWC	Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children
WEF	World Education Forum

INFORMATION ON UGANDA

Table 0.1. Uganda National Information Sheet

Location	East Africa, Africa
Longitude	29034'E & 3500
Latitude	4012'N & 1029'
Total surface Area	241,550.6 Km ²
Area under	194,881 Km ²
Arable Land	197,097 Km ²
Irrigated Land	43,941 Km ²
Area under water & swamps	46,669 Km ²
Countries Bordering	Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda
Climate	Temperature 150-300 C, Rainfall 600 - 2,000 mm/year
Altitude: Minimum: Maximum	620 meters: 5110 meters
Natural Resources	Air, water, land, climate, plants and animals
Population (2005)	27.2 million- (32 million - Projections by UBOS in 2010)
Population Growth Rate	3.4 per cent
Birth Rate	Average of 7 children per woman
Infant Mortality Under 5	82: 1,000
Maternal Mortality	506: 100,000
Life Expectancy	48.1 years
HIV/AIDS Prevalence Rate	6 per cent
Literacy Rate	70 per cent
Religion	Protestants, Catholics, Moslems, Orthodox, African traditional believers
Official Languages	English, Kiswahili
GDP (2005)	Shs 15,134 billion
Income per Capita (2005)	Shs 570,000 (\$ 330)
Inflationary Rate	6.5 per cent

Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda- 2007-2010 (GoU 2007:xi).

Figure 0.1. Demographic and ethno-linguistic map of Uganda:



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Languages_of_Uganda.png

[Accessed on 24 July 2008].

1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE 1997 UPE POLICY AND REGIONAL POVERTY AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN UGANDA (1997-2007)

Inequality is ubiquitous in today's world (Kotani 2004:17)

1.1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to explore whether or not the 1997 Universal Primary education (UPE) policy has eliminated regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda. The overall goals of the 1997 UPE policy are admirable, hinged on the marked disparities and inequalities that have increased over the years, as pointed out by the Government White Paper entitled Education for National Integration and Development, Implementation of the Recommendations of the Report of the Education Policy Review Commission, passed by Parliament in 1992 (Government of Uganda 1992). The persistence of disparities within and between regions, in spite of the UPE policy, remains a major concern for the government after over ten years of implementation. Therefore, comparing UPE between the different gender, socio-economic status, ethnic origin or place of residence in Uganda, can provide the basis for a better understanding of the extent to which inequalities and disparities have been eliminated since the launching of the UPE policy, and help determine the reforms best suited to the new order and economic conditions (Hans 1949 cited in Odaet and Bbuye 1997). Intense controversy however surrounds the question of how to undertake comparative studies (Zuze 2008).

It is of note that research before 1977 rarely focused on schooling beyond urban/rural distinctions or ethnic distinctions (Kelly and Altbach 1986). The United Nations Education and Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) publication on the *Regional Disparities in Educational Development*, edited by Carron and Châu (1980) brought to the fore regional inequalities as a new category that may yield revealing insights. This may be especially true for the Ugandan case, for one reason, Uganda fits the process of regionalisation evident

in most African countries, with sharply distinct geographical, economic, cultural and ethnic characterisations (Foster 1980) divided by what Mukwaya, Sengendo and Shuaib (2008) refer to as the imaginary line that runs from East to West. Varied approaches to the analysis of regional inequalities have been adapted and used in contemporary publications - such as the three volumes edited by Teese, Lamb, Duru-Bellat and Helme (2007) - which explore inequality in education using quantitative, qualitative, descriptive, analytical, sociological and historical methods among others. In this thesis, a unique conceptual framework using an integrative approach i.e. Critical ethnography, social construction, and emancipatory paradigms will be used to understand the relationship between the 1997 Universal Primary education (UPE) policy and regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda in the decade from 1997 to 2007 with a view to find common solutions to these inequities.

The desperate condition of Primary schools in African countries is best described by Johnson and Beinart (2008:7) citing Combs (1968), who draw attention to the 'World Education Crisis', stating, despite good progress, many of the problems afflicting education remain, and are most visible in the educational systems of countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Odada (2005:9) refers to these as the 'numerous disenabling factors in the schools that hamper quality education delivery and consequently poor achievements and poor results', exacerbated by a dearth of facilities required for free universal Primary education, an acute shortage of trained teachers, suitable school buildings, funding deficiencies, transport and school meals (Chaube and Chaube 2006). In view of these challenges, progress towards the Educational for All (EFA) goals set out at the 2000 Forum for Education in Dakar, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set at the Millennium Summit in New York, in 2000 seem unlikely to be met globally. In Uganda, it is inconceivable that all children who entered school in the 2009 academic year, and all those currently in school will complete the seven-year Primary cycle by the target date of 2015. To illustrate this point, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) (2005), the World Bank (2006) and Kasirye (2009) all underline the fact that the biggest drawback in Uganda today is that less than half of those children who enrol, complete the Primary education cycle. More worrying is the fact that, many of those who do complete, leave with unacceptably low levels of knowledge and skills (Johnson and Beinart 2008; UNESCO 2008). Further, as will be elaborated in the next and subsequent

chapters, adults who are craving for basic numeracy and literacy skills are neglected - as it was assumed that those (school-age, out-of-school and adults) who never had access to education earlier would be reached through UPE and in that way lifelong learning would be realised (MoES 2006).

The data used in this thesis illustrated this reality and the contradictions in implementation of this policy. The data was collected during a one-year field study in Uganda, between June 2007 and May 2008, using the qualitative integrated approach discussed in Section 1.7 and elaborated in Chapter 3 on methods and methodology. A unique characteristic of this thesis is that it used the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality II (SACMEQ) (2005) Survey on Numeracy and Literacy levels for Grade 6 in Uganda, collected between 2000-2002, three years after the launch of UPE, to validate the empirical findings of the fieldwork. The thesis made a comparative study of three schools located in the urban, peri-urban and rural areas of Uganda (comprising both poor and affluent areas) across two regions of the country (North-East and Central) to understand whether UPE had levelled the playing field and benefited the poorest people most. Specifically, the aim of this thesis was to examine whether this policy had helped to eliminate disparities, with specific focus being laid on regional poverty and educational inequalities.

This thesis consists of seven Chapters. The Introductory Chapter presents the statement of the problem, conceptual framework, objectives, research questions, the significance, and limitations that guided this investigation. Chapter 2 provides the empirical and theoretical background of the review of literature on poverty and education inequalities and the strategic initiatives that have been adopted to address the disparities in the education system. Chapter 3 describes the methods and methodology. It sets out the theoretical orientation and the epistemology that underpins the thesis. It also highlights the SACMEQ II (2005) survey data which was used to complement and validate the findings of the qualitative field data of the thesis. Chapter 4 gives a systematic presentation of the findings from the data accumulated during the year-long fieldwork in Uganda, alongside the SACMEQ II data. It demonstrates how the data was analysed, coded and interpreted in line with each of the research questions. Chapter 5 focuses on the analytical review of the findings *vis-à-vis* that of secondary sources, such as the SACMEQ II survey data and other

administrative data. Chapter 6 brings together all the scholarly elements developed in the thesis. It presents the conclusions and policy implications, by linking them to the overall research aims and how the thesis contributes to knowledge in this discipline. The study conclusion in Chapter 7 provides reflections on the methodological approach and suggestions for further work from a more equity focused approach in light of the findings.

1.2 National Context

The Republic of Uganda is a landlocked country, located in the East African Region, lying astride the equator between latitudes 4° North and 1° 30 South and between longitudes 29° 30 East and 35° East of Greenwich (Uganda Population Report 2007). As a result of its location and altitude, Uganda's climate is characterised by two alternating climatic seasons, namely the wet and dry seasons, during the year. The different regions comprise 80 districts (thirteen new districts are in the pipeline to be approved). The Uganda Local Authorities Association (ULAA) has grouped these districts into four regions, namely: 'central, western, northern and eastern' (Rwabwogo *et al.*, 2007:1). The central, eastern and western parts of the country have two rainy seasons a year, with heavy rains in the March-May season and light rains in the September-December season. The SACMEQ II (2005) study on Uganda notes that as one moves towards the Northern parts of the country, the rains decrease with only one rainy season being experienced a year.

The variations in soil fertility between the country's regions cause the vegetation cover also to vary between the regions, for instance the central and western parts of the country have more fertile soils and thus have mainly tropical rain forest vegetation, while the Eastern and Northern parts have savannah woodlands and semi-desert type of vegetation. These geographical factors, discussed in the literature review, condition the socio-economic potential and population carrying capacities of various regions within Uganda. The vast majority of the people are peasant farmers and their economic base is agriculture. Eighty-six per cent of the population live in rural areas, and are employed in agriculture (Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development MFPEd 2004). The projections from UBOS indicate that the

population of Uganda in 2010 is 31.8 million. By 2050, the UN projects that the population will reach 91.3 million. The population is youthful: more than 50% are below 15 years of age, and the dependency ratio (i.e., the share of those aged 0-14 and 65+ as a share of those aged 15-64) is among the highest in the world (MFPED 2010). At a 3.2% population growth rate, Uganda stands higher than Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) average of 2.4 per cent (United Nations Development Programme 2007:6), and other emerging economies that Uganda looks to for comparison.

Ugandan society has gone through a number of reforms in the key sectors of the economy. This has led to major improvements in the well-being of the Ugandan people as indicated in some of the key demographic indicators given in Table 0.1 and 1.1. Nevertheless, many challenges remain, especially in regard to regional education and poverty inequalities, which is the focus of this thesis.

Table 1.1. Selected demographic indicators for population censuses (1948-2007)

Indicator	Census year						
	1948	1959	1969	1980	1991	2002	2007
Population (millions)	5.0	6.5	9.5	12.6	16.7	24.7	28.4
Population increase (millions)	NA	1.5	3.0	3.1	4.1	8.0	4.4
Sex ratio	100.2	100.9	101.9	98.2	96.5	96.0	NA
Intercensal growth rate	NA	2.5	3.9	2.7	2.5	3.4	NA
Average annual increase('000)	NA	143	300	282	367	686	NA
Crude birth rate	42.0	44.0	50.0	50.0	52.0	47.3	NA
Total fertility	5.9	5.9	7.1	7.2	7.1	6.9	6.7
Crude death rate	25.0	20.0	19.0	NA	17.0	15.0	NA
Infant mortality rate ('000)	200.0	160.0	120.0	NA	122.0	160.0	76
Density (population/sq.km)	25.2	33.2	48.4	64.4	85.0	126.0	NA

Source: Demographic and Health Survey - Uganda (December 2001) and Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2002 Population and Housing Census Provisional Results, UBOS 2010, Population of Uganda.

Note: N.A means 'Not Applicable' or 'Not Available'

1.3 Poverty Inequality and Education Inequality

1.3.1 Poverty Inequality

Discussions about poverty often lead people to assume that poverty and inequality are the same thing. ‘Inequality means that not everyone has an equal share’ (DFID 2001). A reduction in poverty inequality can make a big difference in terms of income and well-being in later life. Reducing poverty in a sense is like reducing inequality. However, income is the common denominator in understanding these two terms. Income has overshadowed all other approaches in measuring poverty. Chambers (2000:45) argues that ‘the narrow technical definition of poverty, for the purpose of measurement and comparison, is what led poverty to be defined in terms of income which is more easily and readily measured’. This is then used to deduce the level of inequality in society. In Uganda, poverty remains a predominantly rural phenomenon (UNDP 2007) as illustrated by Table 1.2. Inequalities take on a more regional dimension, with the North and North-East remaining the poorest regions in the country, despite a period of remarkable growth. The North trails the rest of the country at 63.3 per cent, followed by the East, at 46.0 per cent. The Central and Western regions are at 16.4 and 20.5 per cent respectively. Nationally, the poverty head count declined to 31 per cent for 2005/06 from 56 per cent in 1992/93 and 38 per cent in 2002/03 (UBOS 2006).

The North is the poorest region with the largest depth of poverty, the worst inequality, characterized by the poor having large mean household sizes, least education, least mean household income, least expenditure on health, lowest chance of child survival and highest concentration in the rural areas (Okurut, Odwee and Adebua 2002). Northern and Eastern regions have the highest poverty head count (Table 1.2). There is a significant difference in the poverty head count between and within regions, and between rural and urban areas. The poverty differentials between regions may be explained by the location of major industries and the capital city effect, in the Central regions, which render high paid employment opportunities to those residing nearest to these locations.

Table 1.2. Poverty and inequality by spatial subgroup, 1992 to 2006

	Poverty head count					Gini coefficient of inequality				
	1992/1993	1997	1999/2000	2002/2003	2005/2006	1992/1993	1997	1999/2000	2002/2003	2005/2006
National	55.7	45.0	33.8	31.1	31.1	0.36	0.35	0.40	0.43	0.408
Rural	59.7	49.2	37.4	34.2	34.2	0.33	0.31	0.33	0.36	0.363
Urban	27.8	16.7	9.6	13.7	13.7	0.40	0.35	0.43	0.48	0.432
Central	45.6	27.9	19.7	22.3	16.4	0.40	0.36	0.42	0.46	0.417
Eastern	58.8	54.3	35.0	46.0	35.9	0.33	0.33	0.35	0.36	0.354
Northern	72.2	60.9	63.6	63.3	60.7	0.32	0.28	0.32	0.36	0.331
Western	53.1	42.8	26.2	31.4	20.5	0.34	0.31	0.34	0.34	0.342

Source: Okidi *et al.*, (2005), Ssewanyana (2006), UBOS (2006) in UNDP (2007) and Mukwaya *et al.*, (2008).

1.3.2 Education Inequality

The heart of the question of educational inequalities is closely tied to the structure of society and the unequal distribution of income, cultural assets and power among the various social groups (Carron and Châu 1980:9). The UNESCO (2010) Global Monitoring Report, suggests that evidence from household surveys indicates that official data may have understated the number of out-of-school children by 30 per cent. Nonetheless, through the concerted efforts of international agencies and the national governments, significant progress has been made in the past decade, in reducing the number of out-of-school children worldwide, as a way of escaping poverty and eliminating education inequality. For instance, Green (2009:43) observes that, ‘Between 1999 and 2006 the number - *of out of school children* - fell by around 21 million to 72 million’. In Uganda, the figures of out-of-school children dropped with the launching of UPE in 1997. Deininger (2003) observed that most of the newly enrolled students came from marginalised groups especially girls and low-income families. It is also the case that the biggest numbers of out-of-school children still live in the rural areas and are concentrated in the peripheral regions especially in the North (Appleton 2009). The Uganda Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) (GOU 2004) observes that education is the best tool to fight inequality, yet as Appleton (2003:601) argues the, ‘growing spatial differences in living standards - between urban and rural areas, between the North and Centre - are the most pronounced and worrying inequalities to emerge in Uganda in the period - 1990s’.

Poverty and educational inequality are two broad areas with separate strands and implications for the UPE policy agenda. By delineating these two concepts, the study will set out the parameters for the epistemological foundations in which this theoretical work will rest. These persistent disparities between West (South and Central) and East (North and North-East) provide the thread through which this thesis runs, and the basis for discussion on the Government’s role in the eradication of inequalities, given next.

1.4 The Role of Education in the Eradication of Poverty and Inequality

Expanding education provision was a key aspiration of post-colonial Governments in Africa from the 1950s (Unterhalter and Oommen 2009). Education was viewed as fundamental for creating a human resource base that was central for national development and economic growth (Fagerlind and Saha 1989; Hanushek and Wobmann 2007; Mayers 1964 in Zuze 2008). This is still the driving force for education today, reinforced in the 1990s, through the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and at the turn of the 21st century through the MDGs 1, 2 and 3, which aims at eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, universalising Primary education, and promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. With this in mind, the basic question in this Section is - what is the role of education in the eradication of poverty; and which form (formal or non-formal) or level (basic or post basic) of education is the most influential for poverty elimination?

1.4.1 Formal Education

The World Bank (1995:56) explored this issue in great depth and concluded that: ‘[i]n low- and middle-income countries the rates of return to investments in basic formal (primary and lower-secondary) education are generally greater than those of higher education’ and that: ‘[e]ducation - especially basic (primary and lower-secondary) education - helps reduce poverty by increasing the productivity of the poor, by reducing fertility and improving health, and by equipping people with the skills they need to participate fully in the economy and society’ (World Bank 1995:1). Similarly, Psacharopoulos (1994), who has written extensively on this subject, argues that public and private rates of returns to education are generally the highest at the primary level and that this trend is most evident in low-income countries. This view has featured prominently among the many development priorities of developing countries since the early 1960s.

However, contemporary studies have increasingly laid emphasis on quality education as a prerequisite for attaining the EFA and the MDG Goals (1 and 2). A 2006 World Bank study pointed out that there is clear evidence that the poverty

reducing effects of Primary education come not from years of education received, but rather from improved literacy and numeracy. The United Nations End Poverty 2015, Millennium Development Goals Fact Sheet, observes that, '[a]chieving universal Primary education means more than full enrolment. It also encompasses quality education, meaning that all children who attend school regularly attain basic literacy and numeracy skills and complete Primary school on time'. One could deduce from this observation that access is not enough: retention and good education outcomes are equally important in the fight against poverty. There are however major concerns about this policy approach of concentrating on formal universal Primary education and ignoring non-formal education in the eradication of poverty. Nakabugo *et al.*, (2008:62) caution that, 'there are still many children in Uganda who cannot access formal education due to the unique circumstances in which they live or the negative attitudes of parents towards formal schooling'. This reality makes us question whether UPE on its own can guarantee the universality of formal basic education in a country like Uganda, or in other developing countries, considering that alternative approaches of delivery of education (such as non-formal education and adult education) have proven to be influential in imparting numeracy and literacy skills for those who cannot access the formal education system as discussed next.

1.4.2 Non-Formal Education

Studies have identified non-formal education and adult literacy as a very important path out of poverty (Nyerere 1968; Preece 2007). Studies carried out within the context of the British Academy of African Partnerships Project (BAAP) which attempted to equip participants with relevant skills that would ultimately enable them to apply non-formal education to the process of poverty reduction in a beneficial manner, concluded that, 'NFE should be seen as an education system in its own right - equal but not necessarily the same as formal education provision, although there might be overlaps in terms of process and outcomes' (University of Glasgow 2006:4). Non-formal education case studies from four African countries (Malawi, Lesotho, Nigeria and Botswana) concluded that NFE is 'an ingredient for poverty reduction' if approached holistically and linked to income generating opportunities (Nampota *et al.*, 2009).

Preece (2007), also the convener of these discussions, contributes to this UPE versus NFE debate, arguing that, in concentrating almost exclusively on fostering Primary education alone, non-formal education has been largely ignored. She makes a strong case for NFE as a viable alternative to UPE especially for disadvantaged people who are unable to obtain UPE due to the restrictive nature of formal schooling even when it is provided free. Similarly Nakabugo *et al.*, (2008) citing Lockheed *et al.*, (1991) assert that some communities and families in Uganda value child labour (because of the income that accrues from it for family survival) more than formal schooling, thereby affecting children's access to formal schooling. It is in this regard that non-formal education has been proposed as an important 'complementary' form of Universal Primary Education in Uganda.

With the UPE policy currently being equated with poverty eradication, the potential of NFE to reach the poor school-age out-of-school children, and adults, has been underestimated. Seel emphasises that, 'general poverty reduction strategies will not necessarily reach excluded groups, unless specifically designed to do so' (DFID cited by Seel in UNICEF 2006b:6). The formulation and strengthening of national strategic planning and poverty reduction frameworks that integrate UPE and NFE, targeting those children, youths and adults most likely to miss out of quality UPE, should thus be pursued as a mitigating measure, to address the latent and persistent regional inequalities in the country. Since Uganda is the context for this thesis, I provide a background to the launching of the UPE policy in 1997 and the complex policy dynamics related to implementation of these policy reforms, and how it impacted on the different settings, locations and regions in Uganda.

1.5 Education Reforms and the Evolution of the UPE Policy

In 1987, one year after assuming power, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, appointed the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC). The EPRC reported their findings to the Government in 1989. A major recommendation made was the universalisation of Primary education (UPE) as soon as possible, but not later than 2000. Following this report, the Government appointed the White Paper

Committee. The Government White Paper on education was subsequently published in 1992, endorsing the operationalisation of the recommendations of the review commission. The date for the universalisation of Primary education was extended by the White Paper to 2003, and the reforms necessary to achieve this objective were outlined. Most of these reforms began in 1993 under the umbrella of the Primary Education and Teacher Development Project (Syngellakis and Arudo 2006). The next section describes the key landmarks of the policy implementation through the 1990s into the 21st century.

1.5.1 Education in the 1990s and at the Beginning of the 21st Century

The vibrant education sector during the 1990s and the 21st century was influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Internally, UPE was driven by the desire to secure votes in the highly contested electoral campaigns of 1996, where politicians made public (and sometimes hasty) pledges for free education (Stasavage 2005). Externally, support for UPE had an international flavour orchestrated by the highly praised Jomtien Conference of 1990, with its education agenda of universal Primary education schooling, early childhood and adult literacy, and the World Conference on Education in Dakar Senegal of 2000, which narrowed this down to education for all (EFA) with the global agenda of universalising Primary education (King 2004). The rearticulated goal came to be access to and completion of Primary education, especially by girls as the core agenda, and disregarding early childhood education, non-formal skills and tertiary education (Juuko and Kabonesa 2007; cited in King 2004). Agencies that had previously supported user fees were now actively supporting free UPE.

Initially, ‘UPE was launched in 1997 as a national programme aimed at providing free education to four children per family, and later re-defined to include all Ugandan children of school-going age’ (Association for the Development of Education in Africa 2005:44). Under UPE, school uniforms were made optional although many teachers insisted that school uniform be worn so that socio-economic difference among children from different backgrounds would be less noticeable (Zuze 2008). The Government came up with a UPE policy implementation plan specifying who is responsible for which components such as

infrastructure provision, capitation grants, and the provision of qualified teachers (ADEA 2005:48-49). Decision making was systematically transferred to district councils and to school management committees, as part of integrated efforts to improve the administration of the UPE system (Zuze, 2008).

Despite the remarkable achievement under UPE, the problems identified by the 1989 Report of the Education Commission, and the Government White Paper on the Education Policy Review Commission (1992:5), seem to have persisted through the 1990s and into the early 21st century, i.e. 'Inefficiency in management and lack of systemic planning at all levels, leading to wastage and inefficient use of resources'. McGee (2000:101) writes that: '[i]n terms of administrative and institutional capacity, it is plain that the abrupt introduction of the UPE did not allow sufficient priming of educational structures and systems'. Moreover, Moulton *et al.*, (2002:70) in their study of the UPE reforms in Uganda state that:

Soon after UPE was announced, many schools reported that the grants had either dwindled or had simply not been available to the school. Some teachers believed the grants never reached the District Offices, while others could not explain why they dwindled.

Further, household survey data such as UBOS (2002, 2005), indicate that, inequalities have grown under the 1997 UPE policy with the geographically poor and remote areas mostly in the North and North-East lagging behind the Central and Western regions of the country in all the poverty and educational indicators, this is attributable partly to the political dispensation over the past two decades as well as the historical injustices and regional inequality discussed in Section 2.2.5 and 4.2.1. Therefore, although Uganda has enjoyed strong growth and substantial poverty reduction during the 1990s, this has not been evenly spread across the country (Appleton 2003, 2009; GoU 2007). It could therefore be emphasised that schools alone cannot reduce inequalities along gender, ethnic, socio-economic and regional lines without a genuine effort to redress the overall problem of social, ethnic and social stratification which the school system quite often tends to maintain and reproduce (Chinapah 1987:5).

The 1997 UPE policy, nevertheless, accelerated the policy dialogue between external funders and the Government, culminating in the Education Sector Investment Plan (ESIP) 1998-2003. ESIP laid the basis for Uganda's education strategy to cope with the UPE bulge and the consequences of the Government's rapid or 'Big Bang' approach to the launch of UPE. The revised Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2008-2015, which replaced the ESIP 1998-2003, and ESSP 2004-2015 reflected changes during the implementation, providing a shift from an emphasis on universal Primary education as the highest Government priority in the sector, to a more balanced concern for post-Primary education and training.

In the next Section, I will briefly outline the structure of Uganda's education system to provide a picture of how education in the country is organised. This will be the basis for further discussions on the context of this thesis on regional poverty and educational inequalities and how they could be addressed.

1.5.2 Structure of Uganda's Education System

The current four-tier model structure of Uganda's education system is a by-product of the system under the British, it has been in existence since the publication of the 1963 Castle Commission report. It consists of seven years of Primary education, followed by a four-year cycle of lower secondary, a two-year cycle of upper secondary (7-4-2), after which there is two to five years of tertiary education. There is also a two-year pre-primary stage of education attended by some three to five year olds. There is no public provision of pre-Primary schooling, and consequently a majority of children do not enrol in nursery schools. The progression from one level to the next (e.g. from primary to secondary) is through national examinations administered by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB). This progression structure, therefore, makes the education system highly selective and pyramidal in nature. Table 1.3 provides the opportunities for progression in the education structure.

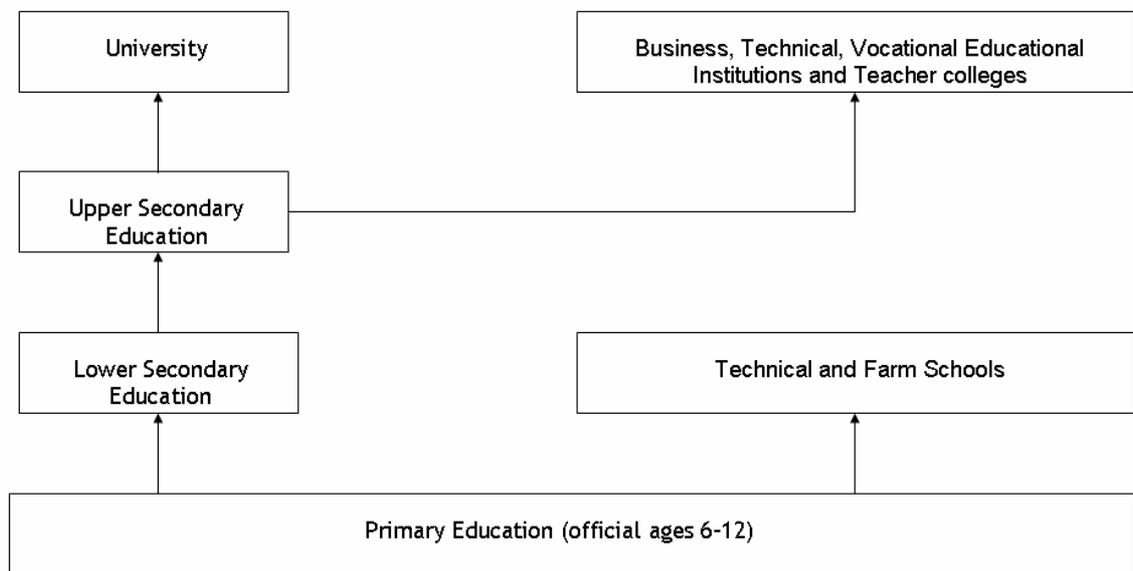
Table 1.3. Progression in Uganda's education system

Education level	Cycle	Award	Progress opportunities
Pre- Primary	2 Years	-	Primary education
Primary education	7 Years	Primary Leaving Examination (PLE)	Lower Secondary (O' Level) Technical school
Lower Secondary (Ordinary Level)	4 Years	Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE)	Upper Secondary (A' Level) Primary Teachers College Technical Institute Other Departmental Training Institutes
Technical School	3 Years	Certificate	Technical Institute.
Upper Secondary (Advanced Level)	2 Years	Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE)	University Uganda College of Commerce National Teachers College Uganda Technical College Other Departmental Training Institutes
Primary Teachers College	2 Years	Certificate	National Teachers College
Technical Institute	2 Years	Certificate	Uganda Technical College
Uganda College of Commerce	2/3 Years	Diploma	University
National Teachers College	2 Years	Diploma	University
Uganda Technical College	2 Years	Diploma	University
University	3/5 Years	Diploma/Degree	Post Graduate Studies

Source: Government of Uganda (1992) Government White Paper on the Education Policy Review Commission Report, Kampala.

Certification occurs at the levels, with the PLE, UCE, and UACE certificates offered by UNEB as indicated above, alternative certificates for technical education also exist. Even though non-formal education programmes are recognised within the education system, with a Department at the MoES that is responsible for NFE, there is no certification for non-formal education which is nationally recognised by the MoES. The structure of Uganda’s education system is illustrated in Figure 1.1. It includes a range of formal, but does not contain pre-school or non-formal learning opportunities for children, youths and adults.

Figure 1.1. Uganda structure of the education system



Source: Government of Uganda (1992) Government White Paper on the Education Policy Review Commission Report, Kampala

1.5.3 Mission and Mandate of the Ministry of Education and Sports

The organisation of Primary education in Uganda is based upon a set of guiding principles reflecting the mission and mandate of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and derives from the recommendations of the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC 1989), that was subsequently refined into the 1992 White Paper. The policy is underpinned by the current mission, vision and strategic objectives of the education sector as follows:

Mission, Vision and Strategic Objectives of the Ministry of Education and Sports

<p>Mission Statement</p> <p>‘To provide for, support, guide, coordinate, regulate and promote quality education and sports to all persons in Uganda for national integration, individual and national development’</p>
<p>Vision Statement</p> <p>‘Quality Education and Sports For All’</p>
<p>Strategic Objectives</p> <p>To ensure universal and equitable access to quality basic education for all children through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early Childhood Care and Development for children up to 8 years.• Universal Primary Education for children from 6 years to 12 years• Education for the disadvantaged groups from 6 years to 18 years <p>To improve the Quality of Education in the following levels:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In Primary Education by ensuring pass rates in literacy and numeracy (at the appropriate class grade) levels through the National Assessment of Progress of Education (NAPE).• In Post-primary Education by ensuring achievements attainment targets and pass rates in English, Mathematics, Science and Information Technology.• To ensure equal access by Gender, District and Special Needs at all levels of Education.• To build capacity of districts by helping Education Managers acquire and improve on their knowledge, skills and attitudes to be able to plan, monitor, account and perform managerial functions.

Source: MoES (2010).

The Ministry of Education and Sports, Vision and Mission are being operationalised by the Education Strategic Investment Plan (ESIP 1998-2003), the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2004-2015), and the current ESSP 2007-2015, to accommodate emerging priorities and reforms. A summary of the core objectives of the 1997 UPE policy are provided as follows:

1. Making basic education accessible to the learners and relevant to their needs as well as meeting national goals;
2. Making education equitable in order to eliminate disparities and inequalities;

3. Establishing, providing and maintaining quality education as the basis for promoting the necessary human resource development;
4. Initiating a fundamental positive transformation of society in the social, economic and political fields; and
5. Ensuring that education is affordable by the majority of Ugandans by providing, initially, the minimum necessary facilities and resources, and progressively the optimal facilities, to enable every child to enter and remain in school until they complete the Primary education cycle.

(Source: MoES 1999a:10).

All these UPE objectives are interlinked as will be discussed; however the focus of this thesis is on core objective 2 of the policy.

1.5.4 Motivation for Selection of: Urban, Peri-urban and Rural Areas

The three distinct educational sites are located in two districts, one in Central Uganda and the other two sites in North-East Uganda, encompassing the urban, peri-urban and rural areas. These educational sites provided the right mix for a comparative study on the regional, geographic, rural/urban, ethnolinguistic and socio-economic divergences in the country. They also provided a good basis for understanding whether or not the 1997 UPE policy has eliminated disparities and inequalities in the education system. The study helps to illuminate whether the claims that girls and poor people benefited most from UPE, are valid (Deininger 2003). The analysis of the regional inequalities was conducted on the outcomes of the PLE results from these three educational settings, as PLE examinations constitute the main education indicator for educational achievement at the end of the seven year Primary cycle in Uganda. Other Primary education indicators given in Table 1.4 were reviewed to enrich the discussions, it was believed that these indicators have an impact on academic achievement. The characteristics of the area in which the school is located, urban, peri-urban and rural, is described in the *Uganda Educational Statistics Abstract 2008*, containing the

MoES Annual School Census data for school particulars. For this thesis, the UPE School in the urban area was located in Kampala city; the peri-urban UPE School, in the small town, of Soroti Municipality, while the rural UPE School was located in a village, in Kamuda Sub-County.

Table 1.4. Indicators for Primary education in three locations

Indicator	Urban City/ Kampala (Central)	Peri-urban Soroti Town (East)	Rural/ Kamuda in Soroti(East)	National
Population	1,358,800,	41,000	*22,902	27.2
Adult Literacy Rate	83%			70%
Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)	28	57	156	54
Pupil Class Ratio (PCR)	72		-	-
Pupil Classroom Ratio (PCR)	41	86	-	79
Net Enrolment Rate (NER)	43	102	-	-
Gross Enrolment Rate (GER)	50.7%	121.4	-	113.1
Gross Intake Rate (GIR)	37%	-	-	-
Net Intake Rate (NIR)	20.2	75.9	-	57.4

Sources: (MoES, Education Statistics Abstract, 2007)

*Estimates derived from the World Vision study in Kamuda

** Soroti Report Volume I and II (calculated by the author)

1.6 Statement of the Problem

Since January 1997, the Government has implemented the Universal Primary education (UPE) policy with the underlying objective of ‘making Primary education equitable in order to eliminate disparities and inequalities’ (MoES 1999a:10). It was argued that the removal of school fees through UPE would contribute to poverty reduction by ensuring universal access to basic education, which in turn would break the cycle of poverty. There is a precedent in many African countries. For instance, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda, abolished

school fees, which led to a surge in enrolment (United Nations 2008b): In Uganda, '[e]nrolments surged, rising immediately from 2.3 million to 5.7 million in 1997 and 6.9 million in 2001' (Wils *et. al.*, 2005:53).

Despite the dramatic expansion in enrolment after the abolition of fees, it is not clear whether the 1997 UPE policy has resulted in the reduction of disparities and inequalities between regions. A UNICEF (2006a) Report suggests that only 22 per cent of those who started UPE in 1997 completed the 7 year Primary cycle, of which only 1.3 per cent, are from the North. Unfortunately, Kasirye (2009:2) observes that, '[m]ost of the regular household surveys only collect information relating to school enrolment and access to schools'. The available data is not disaggregated to highlight the disparities in learning outcomes between and within regions. The World Bank (2006) notes that the low retention, completion and learning outcomes, that followed the launch of UPE are underemphasised, while information that supports the UPE policy as a success are emphasised. Consequently, we know much about enrolments, but very little about the disparities in the learning outcomes, intricately linked to forms of social exclusion on the basis of place of residence, gender, disability, family income, ethnolinguistic and cultural differences.

A UNESCO (2008:199) Report attempted to understand why politicians and several African Governments frequently dwell on the high enrolments under UPE in their political agenda, observing that: '[u]ndertaking highly visible reforms such as the abolition of user fees often generates a high and fast political return'. Less visible reforms, such as the provision of non-formal education, adult education and lifelong learning opportunities do not have the same effect. Further, the UNESCO Report observes that publishing the high drop-out rates or disparities and inequalities in the system cannot generate political capital. It could be argued therefore that evaluators, administrators, bureaucrats and donors have sidestepped the ideological and philosophical battles concerning the many challenges which exist, negatively affecting the millions of children and youths under the UPE policy reforms, by becoming what Waters (1999) refers to as political and institutional players - deliberately avoiding to address the difficult and uncomfortable issues in their analysis of poverty and educational inequality in Uganda. Brock *et al.*, (2002:30) in their assessment of the poverty policy context in Uganda capture this rather well, arguing that:

Poverty knowledge that reveals disparities between districts, regions or ethnic groups, or between other social groups, can be politically acceptable, politically taboo or politically manipulable.

The absence of systematic and disaggregated data is thus a serious problem for anyone trying to understand the relationship between the 1997 UPE policy and the regional poverty and educational inequalities. The decision to incorporate Uganda into the SACMEQ II study in 1998, and the subsequent publication of the SACMEQ II report for Uganda in 2005, provided a better understanding of the condition of the disparities and inequalities in the education system, with hard data on learning outcomes generated on variables such as region, gender and social class, through a two-stage stratified sampling procedure for five regions (Central, Eastern, Northern, Western and South Western) (Kasirye 2009). Yet, even with the robust nature of this dataset of 2,452 pupils, the SACMEQ II data has some drawbacks. According to SACMEQ II (2005:37-38), '[s]chools in areas affected by serious military conflicts' were excluded from the survey, arguing that this omission is insignificant as it would not cause a significant change to the findings of the study.

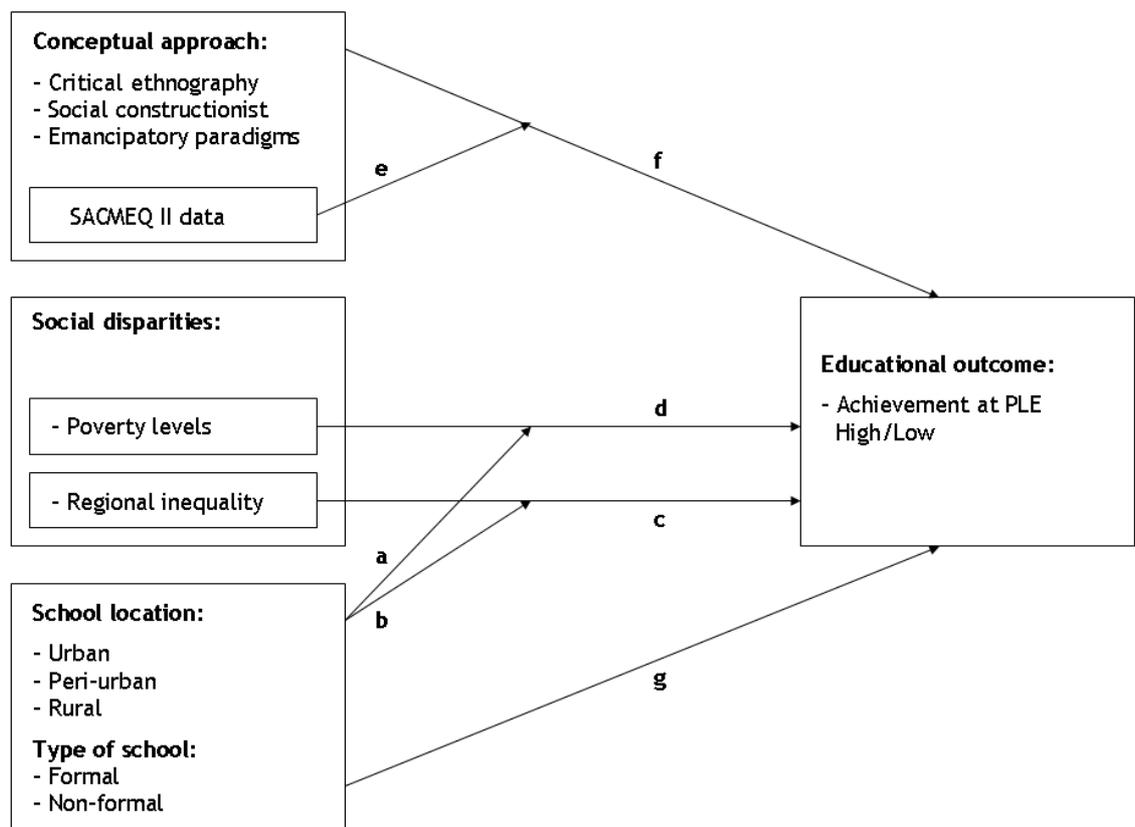
For this thesis, this omission implies that the data, on which SACMEQ II is based, is not rigorous and objective enough, hence it is relatively unreliable especially with regard to understanding the regional inequalities caused by conflict, instability and the resulting poverty especially in the wider North, which is the poorest region in the country. The Gracia Machel Study (2009:iv) on children in armed conflict, in which Uganda, is one of the countries in focus, argues that, 'the appalling consequences that stem from the complex interplay of conflict, poverty and discrimination are often overlooked'. Therefore, the omission, of the most vulnerable and poor schools in the SACMEQ II study provides the rationale for an empirical and a comparative study into the regional inequalities between the poor wider North, and the more prosperous, and affluent South, after a decade of reforms.

A key contribution of this study is to fill the knowledge gap on the inequalities in learning outcomes between and within regions since the launch of the UPE in 1997. This thesis, will provide analytical information for policy action, generated, using the integrated approach of adopting critical ethnography,

social constructionist and emancipatory paradigms. The SACMEQ II Survey data will be used to validate the findings from the year-long qualitative fieldwork in Uganda on the regional poverty and education inequalities. It will also generate evidence-based research for policy advice to guide more targeted efforts that may be needed to tackle the region-specific reasons why children and youths are out-of-school. However, a clear conceptual framework is needed to understand the underlying causes of the persistent regional differences in educational attainments and learning outcomes that are a major concern for the Government of Uganda. This is presented in the next Section.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.2. Conceptual framework



So far, I have described the many different ways in which poverty is exacerbating inequality in the educational sector. In this Section I present the general model of the relationship between poverty and inequality based on geographical location and how these are related to academic achievement in the

PLE. The model is based on the literature reviewed and relates to the specific research questions outlined in Section 1.7.1. In Figure 1.2, the boxes on the left summarise the conceptual approach, social disparities, the different school locations as well as the type of schools. On the right I indicate the student outcomes at the end of the Primary education cycle. In this framework, it is assumed that social disparities between and within regions have a strong influence on academic achievement and hence strong and positive prospects for selection and future earnings.

The PLE results attained at the end of the seven-year cycle will be used to explore this relationship of the poverty and educational inequality between two regions and three education settings/locations (urban, peri-urban and rural areas) of Uganda. But the link between poverty and inequality present us with a conceptual challenge. Therefore, I will give an explanation of the conceptual approach to help understand the poverty, inequality, schools location and school types next.

Conceptual approach: In spite of the ambiguities, the recent conceptual analysis, using the multidimensional perspective, has increasingly been used to complement the qualitative and quantitative perspectives of these two concepts. As will be elaborated in Chapter 3, the primary data collection for this thesis and analysis to explore the above concerns will be principally qualitative, combining the elements of critical ethnography, social constructionist and the emancipatory paradigms (arrow 'f'). SACMEQ II data (arrow 'e') will be used for purposes of validating the empirical findings about the claims of the persistence of inequalities in academic achievement using the integrated theoretical approach to enhance the credibility of this thesis. This conceptual framework will review the issues of poverty and inequality in the schools in developing countries in general and Uganda in particular, through a comparative study, using the regional approach to illuminate both problems and opportunities for change.

Poverty: The poverty levels have been the focus in Uganda because of their consistent association with academic achievement (Okidi and McKay 2003). The poverty levels of students represent the resources that are available to support learning. Students with a stronger support system at home are more likely to

perform well at school (arrow 'a'). Similarly, a student with a stronger support base (academic supervision outside of school) approaches a subject with an academic advantage. Students from poorer backgrounds are likely to drop out of school or perform poorly (arrow 'b'). Based on the literature review, children in the urban areas are anticipated to outperform children in the peri-urban and rural areas in outcomes of PLE attainments across the three locations of the study (arrow 'a').

Inequality: Inequality is described by Plaza (2005) and cited by Stromquist (2007) as the systematic condition regarding the way material and intangible resources are allocated, and how all children have access to equal resources in terms of professional and academic support for an effective teaching and learning. The availability of learning resources has been consistently associated with better and more equitably distributed test scores (Zuze, 2008), this study therefore sought to provide further evidence of this tendency. Inequality between regions in terms of poverty and education in Uganda are expected to impact negatively on educational quality (arrow 'c') with more serious effects on students who have fewer academic options (arrow 'e').

School location- (rural, peri-urban and urban): The school location reflects the characteristics of students who attend the school, whether it is rural, peri-urban or urban. Urban and private schools are expected to have an academic advantage over peri-urban and the rural Government schools (arrow 'a'). Schools in the urban areas or Kampala city have consistently commanded higher prestige and have been more selective in admission, with better teaching, retention rates and learning outcomes. The schools in the peri-urban areas, somewhat, mirror the characteristics of an urban area but to a lesser extent. Schools in rural areas are exposed to a limited amount of education, are poorly equipped, and the teachers tend to be untrained, unqualified and unmotivated. As a result, rural village schools are much more inferior to the UPE schools in the peri-urban areas, and the city. Because less affluent students are expected to benefit more from improvements to school structure, the effect on equity is expected to be positive (arrows 'c' and 'b').

Type of school-formal and non-formal: I define the type of school as either the formal or non-formal according to how the schools organise the teaching and

learning process. We expect that formal schools are characterised by an ordered environment, rigid, and restrictive curriculum which restricts participation in education for poor working children. Non-formal education (NFE), even though recognised within the education system, receives less Government investment, and suffers because of poor progression or follow-up on the utilisation of learning. NFE is characterised by minimal and flexible attendance targeted at particular social groups for particular purposes (arrow 'e') and can be designed to achieve a specific range of context specific outcomes. Promoting the participation of children who do not have access to formal schooling would at the very least increase the levels of participation of children who cannot access regular education.

1.8 Purpose of the Research

Thus far, I have described the objective of this thesis which derives from the 1997 UPE policy objective of making Primary education universal in order to, eliminate the inequalities and disparities. Specifically, the purpose of this research was to explore whether or not the 1997 UPE policy has eliminated regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda with evidence from the past decade of UPE implementation (1997-2007). It did this by exploring the perspectives of five cohorts of Primary school leavers, who completed the 7-year Primary school cycle within the past decade, i.e. between 1997-2003 and 2001-2007, in two regions (Central and North-Eastern) in three distinct educational sites (rural, peri-urban and an urban). Their views on UPE and its effects in the eradication of poverty was also considered. The data from the integrated approach (using critical ethnography, social constructionist and emancipatory paradigms) collected during the year-long fieldwork was validated against the findings of the SACMEQ II (2005) survey data collected three years after the introduction of UPE between 2000 and 2002. I explored the regional inequalities based on PLE attainments so as to predict the outcomes of this policy on the educational and social inequality, as will be elaborated in Chapter 2, and throughout this thesis. I adopted qualitative approaches that are well suited to investigate poor people's perception and their articulation of poverty in response to the 1997 UPE policy and PEAP initiatives.

1.9 Research Questions

The central question of this thesis: taking into account the above problem statement (1.6), conceptual framework (1.7), and the overall objectives (1.8.1) and, with reference to the critical ethnographic approaches (Carspecken 2001 and Creswell 2005), social constructionist (Burr 1995, and Berger and Luckman 1966) and the emancipatory paradigms (in Chilisa and Preece 2005; Lather 1991) is: whether the UPE policy reforms have eliminated the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda, with evidence of a decade of UPE implementation (1997-2007). The five research questions and focus areas of this thesis are interlinked, reflecting the main components of the national priorities as reflected in the ESIP 1998-2003 and ESSP 2007-2015 and in the international agenda towards the MDGs and EFA targets of halving poverty and universalising Primary education by 2015. These key questions were:

1. What is the state of regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda a decade since the launch of the 1997 UPE policy?

a. What is the extent of the regional poverty and educational inequalities in the three geographical locations: urban, peri-urban and rural areas?

b. Is there a pattern to these characteristics across schools in the urban, peri-urban and rural areas?

2. What are the perceptions of Primary leavers and adults¹ on UPE and NFE and the effects of these interventions in reducing poverty and educational inequalities?

a. How do people perceive UPE and NFE? What is their relevance to the life and work of poor people?

b. What do poor people expect from UPE?

3. Is there evidence that UPE is helping poor people to escape from poverty?

a. Is UPE levelling the playing field by promoting well-being in Uganda among the poor marginalised as well as the affluent people?

b. How do the school locations in the rural, peri-urban and urban areas, relate to academic achievement in the Primary leaving examinations?

4. How are poor people in Uganda socially constructed? What is the impact of the social construction on UPE and the learning outcomes for learners across the three different locations?

a. What do the key documents and studies on UPE in Uganda say? Who are the authors? What are their social and political views?

b. How do the socio-political structures lead to the transmittal of policy discourse?

5. How can UPE be meaningfully designed to help reduce regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda?

a. What do the poor people define as the solution to poverty?

b. Is UPE the right approach to eliminate poverty? What about NFE?

1.10 Significance and Limitations

1.10.1 Significance

The significance of this thesis is its unique conceptual framework which integrated the critical ethnographic, social constructionist, and the emancipatory paradigms, in the investigation into the relationship between the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda. This thesis was designed to provide new and better theoretically informed data to complement and challenge the existing quantitative data. This methodological approach of using qualitative data generated from the year-long contextualised fieldwork,

and secondary data sources such as the survey data from the SACMEQ II (2005) research papers, numerous journals and Government publications, provided in-depth insights illuminating the existing, more generalised, reports. This strategy, filled some of the gaps in the current data, identified by the studies conducted by the Government of Uganda, World Bank and other major bilateral and multilateral donors and actors, regarding the 1997 UPE and the PEAP policy (MFPED 2000, 2004) and its impact - especially among the regionally deprived children, youths and adults living in the remote, poor and peripheral areas and villages. The findings were then validated against the robust SACMEQ II data to enhance the credibility of the findings.

1.10.2 Limitations

There were some limitations to this thesis that must be pointed out. The first is that the SACMEQ II survey data used as the basis for validating the findings of the year-long field based study in Uganda has some serious weaknesses. The data collection for SACMEQ II took place in September 2000, three years after the launching of the UPE policy, while the data collection for this thesis, took place after a decade of implementation of the UPE policy. Further, the SACMEQ II survey targeted Grade 6 students, in mathematics and reading achievement, yet, the focus of this thesis was Grade 7 graduates (starting with the first cohort who entered Primary 1 in 1997, and completed in 2003; and those of the subsequent cohorts of 2001-2007 who sat for PLE after completing the seven year primary cycle), and their attainment in all four subjects examined in the PLE in mathematics, English, social studies and science (Owen 2005). Therefore, it is unrealistic to make a comparative analysis of these two sets of data (SACMEQ II and my fieldwork data) or to generalise or validate one against the other without experiencing major gaps.

The second distinctive limitation is that the topic on regional inequalities is 'controversial' (Carron and Chau 1980), and few studies venture into this area. We know a great deal about regional inequalities which were well documented in the Governments' 1992 White Paper of Education, but very little objective empirical data is available on the analyses of trends in the educational and poverty inequalities since the launching of the UPE policy in 1997. The UNICEF Report (2009) underlines the fact that poverty, conflict or marginalisation is

often omitted in empirical works, as data is rarely collected. In Uganda, most current Government publications are vague or silent on regional inequalities - a reality pointed out by Østby *et al.*, (2006) in their assessment of the conflict areas of the North. The data generated by the SACMEQ II Study for Uganda has attempted to elaborate on the inequities, however, there is no systematic data generated by UNEB (Uganda's sole examining body) to indicate any disparities between regions since the launching of the UPE policy in 1997. National level data can mask the inequalities specific to gender, place of residence, ethnic origin, disability and income groups.

The third limitation is the relatively small sample size. Owing to time constraints, the scope and scale of this study was limited to one school in each of the three distinct educational sites (rural, peri-urban and urban). Therefore, it is possible that the perceptions of the sampled Primary leavers and ordinary people about the regional poverty and educational inequalities may not be representative of the situation nationally, especially on the impact of UPE on educational attainments among the poor marginalised groups throughout the country. Further, neither the SACMEQ II Survey Report (2005) nor the MoES Statistical Abstract (2007) - cross referenced in this thesis as complementary sources for education data - reflect the total school population in the country. It is therefore not possible to produce an analysis of all national data on this basis. However, the data from these two sources (my fieldwork and SACMEQ II data sources) give a rich dataset for a more robust analysis for the thesis.

The fourth limitation is the dilemma of the comparative enquiry. Ginsburg and Gorostiaga (2003); Kohn (1987); and, Sztompka (1988) in Ginsburg (2006) state that a comparative analysis based on certain traits is problematic because a diverse country does not lend itself readily to tidy divisions. Moreover, there is the dearth of a complete set of comparable data to demonstrate conclusively the level of marginalisation between regions, socio-economic and ethnic groups in Uganda because, this is a highly emotive subject. Even within the affluent regions, we have the growing phenomena of urban poverty through the sprouting of urban slums, which underlines the fact that inequalities in learning outcomes exist between and within regions. Unterhalter *et al.*, (2010:3) in the case study of Kenya and South Africa - citing (Mugisha 2006) and Mumbai (Kumar, Kumar and Anurag 2007) argue that, 'the advantage of living in an urban area may not

be sustained for slum children, particularly girls' especially if the family is poor. The theoretical assumptions or methodological approaches used to study the phenomena of poverty and inequality, thus present some challenges.

The fifth limitation is that the definition of the locations between the rural, peri-urban and urban was structured from a regional perspective in reference to the facilities and geographical location. In practice, the characteristics appear differently between regions and within regions. For these reasons, it may be difficult to generalise the findings and make recommendations for changes in UPE and poverty interventions for the future. These limitations will be addressed however by the design of the research questions and the use of multiple methods and data sources such as SACMEQ II, MoES Education Abstracts, the UBOS (2002, 2005) data and the ESSAPR Reports from 2004/2005 to 2009/2010, to ensure consistency and credibility of the findings.

1.11 Concluding Remarks

The aim of this thesis was to understand whether or not the 1997 UPE policy had eliminated the regional inequalities in Uganda. Launching UPE was an important milestone in the Ugandan education scene, and a remarkable success especially for poor families whose children were given the opportunity to enrol in school for the first time. I will however be more interested in assessing the trends in the disparities in academic achievements and learning outcomes in the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) for the selected pioneer cohort of UPE graduates for the decade, 1997-2007. It is noted that children in poor and remote regions do not feature among the best performing schools, as the top positions are dominated by schools in the Central and Western regions, especially Kampala city. This is an indication of how the perceived poor quality of 'free' UPE is impacting on the academic performance of poor families and regions, which is predictive of their exclusion in future employment and earnings. For example, Okurut, Odwee, and Adebua (2002) (2002:16) note that:

As the labour market is becoming highly competitive, with higher academic qualifications being demanded for jobs that previously required lower qualifications, these results tend to suggest that the Northern region may be marginalized in the labour market in the long

run if the education trend continues, as the majority of the population in Northern Uganda (69.1 per cent) are poor

From the discussion in this Chapter, it is quite apparent that regional inequalities continue to pose major barriers to fully attaining the MDG 2 and 3 targets for halving poverty, ensuring universal access and gender parity by 2015. The Northern and North-Eastern regions of Uganda are among the poorest, with the largest depth of poverty and the worst inequality across the regions. The comparative approach presented in this Introductory Chapter offers a good point of departure to review the impact of the 1997 UPE policy on education and poverty inequalities between the affluent regions on one hand and the remote and poor regions of Uganda on the other. We will also explore whether the formal UPE is the right approach for poor people, especially given there are large numbers of poor school-age children many of whom are out-of-school.

In the next Chapter, I present a more extensive literature review of the theoretical and empirical background of the regional educational and poverty inequalities, with special attention to studies in Uganda and other developing countries.

2 EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The question of inequalities is by its very nature a subject of controversy. The subject is even more controversial when the discussion is more specifically directed towards the policy (or rather policies) of reducing the inequalities (Carron and Châu, 1980:11).

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter is specifically concerned with the empirical and theoretical background of the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda. However, an exhaustive review of the literature on this whole field would be a formidable task. I have omitted earlier literature on development theories - such as human capital theory, dependency theory, and structural functionalism outlined by Himmelstrand *et al.*, (1994) - to explain poverty and educational inequalities, this is because new research on development focuses on 'freedom' or 'unfreedoms', with the most influential work published by Amartya Sen (1999). Poverty is now increasingly viewed as a multidimensional problem rather than simply as income or consumption, heralded by studies such as the World Bank sponsored Report, *Voices of the Poor, Can Anyone Hear Us?* (Narayan *et al.*, 2002) and UNDP (2002) cited in Preece (2009) and others.

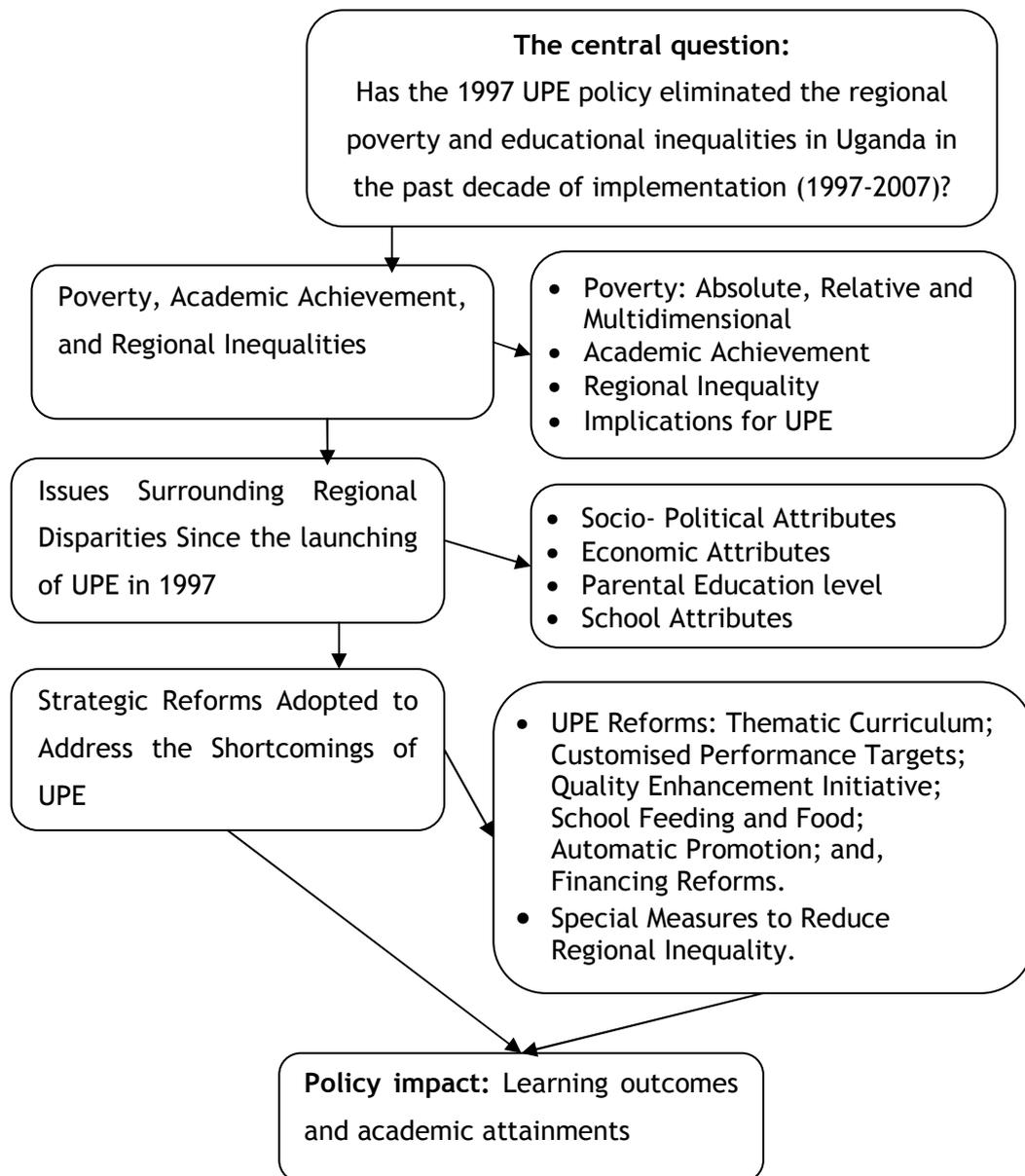
This thesis is premised on the realities in developing countries which face multiple barriers in achieving their educational goals. 'Education plays a key role in determining the course of one's adult life - a higher level of education means higher earnings, better health, and a longer life' (UNICEF 2011:1). 'Compared to a decade ago, far fewer children in developing countries are now out of school' (World Bank 2011:vi), yet despite the progress, the majority of children entering school in these countries must overcome hurdles such as walking long distances, to poorly managed schools with absentee, untrained or unmotivated teachers. The Uganda Education Abstract of 2007 observes that these under-resourced schools lack most of the basic facilities with limited educational support for children enrolled. The likelihood of over-aged children, repetition and high drop-out are common. Most children who survive attain poor learning outcomes after

sitting the highly competitive terminal examinations at the end of the primary cycle. In Uganda, the disparities and inequalities between and within regions are persistent, with education reproducing rather than breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequity through disparities in the provision of early childhood education opportunities, quality primary, secondary and tertiary education necessary for transition into the labour market.

The SACMEQ II (2005) data cautions that some SACMEQ countries, have simultaneously, delivered neither quality nor equity (IIEP 2007). In the case of Uganda, as the educational system expanded, the sector faced complex challenges. Reforms were enacted to contain these challenges. However, there are still millions of out-of-school children who have not been reached. 'The literature on education reforms in developing countries has been increasingly focusing on the extent to which numerous educational reform initiatives were effectively implemented and how they have often failed to achieve their objectives' (Fullan 1991; Higgins 2004; O'Sullivan 2002; Psacharopoulos 1989; Ward *et al.*, 2003 cited by Altinyelken 2009:151). Uganda for instance was prematurely heralded as a success story, with claims that 'Uganda had hit the Education for All Target' (Elwana 2000:8). Research of the 1990s and the early 21st century has shown that the driver for growth is not quantity in terms of enrolment rates or years of schooling, but ultimately what the individual *learns*, both in and out of the classroom (World Bank 2006 2011). The literature indicates that Uganda scored lower than the other participating SACMEQ II countries in the pedagogical results in mathematics and language especially among the low-income families. This has implications for this thesis which seeks to understand the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda.

This Chapter will describe the: (a) poverty, academic achievement and regional inequality and implications for formal schooling that perpetuate inequality through selection and credentialing; (b) issues surrounding regional disparities since the launching of UPE; and (c) strategic initiatives adopted to address the shortcomings of UPE. This Chapter will conclude with a discussion on the policy impacts. Figure 2.1 provides the literature map for this thesis in this broad field of study. This Chapter will point to the observable gaps in the literature. It will question the dominant social construction of knowledge, and propose an integrative methodology in Chapter 3 to fill some of these gaps.

Figure 2.1. Map of the literature



2.2 Poverty, Academic Achievement and Regional Inequality

2.2.1 Poverty - Absolute, Relative and Multidimensional

In the last few years, there has been intense global activity in response to the poverty situation in all countries (coalescing through campaigns such as ‘Make

Poverty History’ - part of the international Global Call to Action Against Poverty) by raising awareness of global poverty, particularly in the Third World, to achieve policy change by Governments. Other global initiatives such as the Declaration of the Millennium Development Goals for the elimination of poverty and the renewed commitments to instruments such as the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) and other modalities like the Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs) (UNICEF 2006b; UNESCO 2006 cited in World Bank 2008) and the debt relief through the Highly Indebted and Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative (World Bank, 2009) have all been pursued. Moyo (2009: xviii) observed that, ‘in the past fifty years, over US\$1 trillion in development related-aid has been transferred to Africa’. This aid, especially starting from the 1970s was reoriented towards poverty, under Robert McNamara, at the World Bank. In the past decade, besides the MDGs, we have the Millennium Challenge Account, the Africa Commission, and the 2005 G7 meeting (to name a few) that pledged support to Africa, with education as one of the priority areas.

The challenge that actors are confronted with in the fight against poverty is how to determine the degree of poverty - whether relative or absolute. The dilemma is, whose definition of poverty counts - the individual’s perception of him/herself, the multidimensional perspective or externally measured criteria such as income? This Section discusses these definitions of poverty, and how they impact on regional poverty inequalities in Uganda. The subsequent Sections further examine how poverty has influenced academic achievements and outcomes of the 1997 UPE policy. These different theoretical and empirical accounts of poverty are discussed next as an introduction to highlight the meaning of these concepts.

2.2.2 Debates between Absolute and Relative Poverty

The theoretical debates on poverty have been largely about definitions. Two approaches to the definition of poverty have predominated since this discussion began more than a hundred years ago; *relative* and *absolute* definitions (Beresford *et al.*, 1999:9). This debate has been long and fierce, with many disagreements. This two level definition of poverty was increasingly used to bridge the ‘first’ and ‘third’ world, and to afford a basis for cross-national measurement (Townsend 2000:211). Yet, the definition and assessment of

poverty are very diverse. Because of this, it is useful to set out the definitions of these two terms.

The *absolute* definition of poverty is based upon the notion of subsistence. Subsistence is the minimum to sustain life, and so being below subsistence is to be experiencing absolute poverty because one does not have enough to live on (Croft and Beresford 1990, Beresford *et al.* 1999). By this definition, being poor means not having food to eat, clothes to wear or shelter over your head. In short, '[a]bsolute poverty means not having the basics to sustain human life; enough food to eat, clothes to wear and shelter' (DFID 2001).

The *relative* definition of poverty became widespread in the 1960s. In Britain for example, the Welfare State was meant to put an end to poverty. Peter Townsend, one of the best known proponents of this definition, citing Croft, 1989, and Beresford *et al.*, 1999, states that: Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resource to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary ... in societies to which they belong.

A clear distinction that is drawn between absolute and relative definitions of poverty is that the former of these two definitions is based on the physical state of the individual and the latter on the relation of the individual to society. Both these definitions of poverty have been refined and developed over time; however they both have limitations. A Department for International Development (DFID 2001) Report observed that if poverty is viewed as a matter of raising incomes, this may lead us to ignore crucial aspects of the lives of the poor - such as poor health, education, access to basic services such as clean water etc. It is in this regard that current studies interpret poverty broadly to include its physical, emotional and psychological characteristics. This evolved into the multidimensional perspective which is increasingly used to complement the relative and absolute definitions of poverty. This concept is discussed in the next Section.

2.2.3 Multidimensionality of Poverty

There is no single correct definition of poverty. Most people now accept that any definition must be understood in relation to the social, cultural and historic contexts. Nobel peace laureate, Amartya Sen (1999), advanced the multidimensional perspective of poverty, arguing that the cumulative effect of poverty leads to “unfreedom” (Preece 2007). He put forward five requirements that should ideally work together in order to bring real development and therefore eliminate poverty. These instrumental freedoms include political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency, and security (Sen 1999). Each of these rights and opportunities are interlinked and help advance the general capability and wellbeing of a person. These together, are now all viewed as the multidimensional perspective of poverty, which is not only a matter of income, but more about freedom as a necessary ingredient for tackling poverty and promoting development. Further, Sen (1999) describes poverty as a complex multidimensional phenomenon that affects people socially, psychologically and economically. It may involve ‘unfreedoms’, such as absence of self-determination, self-esteem, and participatory democracy.

In view of these multiple definitions, Preece (2007:14) puts forward four main analytical categories to classify the different forms of poverty, namely: Income poverty; Capability poverty; Participatory poverty; Consequential poverty. These are all interrelated, as they define poverty in terms of social injustice. It is important to take into account these different categories if we are to ensure a systematic and thorough assessment of the relationship between poverty, Primary education and regional disparities.

In conclusion, poverty exists in all countries. It is viewed as either absolute or relative. It is also a multidimensional phenomenon, interpreted differently in the different contexts. Debates about poverty and how they impact on academic achievement have been clarified by research which suggests that students from less affluent families perform systematically worse when compared to their peers with wealthier parents (Zuze 2008). I explore this issue next.

2.2.4 Academic Achievement

The foremost measure for determining the competence and productivity of schools is academic achievement. The higher the level of achievement, the more it is presumed that there is learning and the greater excellence attributed to the school (Owens 2005:312). For this thesis, academic achievement is defined as the degree to which the learners demonstrate attainment in specified competencies. The Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) has been mandated to measure academic achievement in Uganda. The Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) was the only assessment conducted by UNEB to monitor and evaluate academic achievement. Acana (2005) observes that, PLE is an end-of-cycle examination designed to serve primarily as an instrument for certification and selection of pupils into secondary institutions. The significance of this terminal examination at the end of Primary 7 is well clarified by Owens (2005: 313):

academic achievement was measured by the PLE, an annual national exam that is revised and administered by UNEB. It is Uganda's sole determinant of student performance and promotion from Primary school to higher educational opportunity. The PLE consists of four subtests, each with scores ranging from one point (high) through nine points (low). The aggregate score therefore can potentially range from 4 to 36 points, with 4 being the highest possible aggregate.

The selection of candidates to the next levels through academic achievement based on the annual PLE results, favours schooling for the well-to-do (Odada (2005). This according to Odada is a misuse of examination results. Poverty affects quality, which eventually affects academic achievement. Other factors (such as illness) may prevent a brilliant student from taking assessment tests. The fate of such students is sealed by this natural occurrence which is beyond their control, at the time of these rigidly scheduled tests. These circumstances cannot be indicated in examination results (Olema 2005).

Besides the traditional UPE, two types of assessments have been carried out by UNEB and the Ministry of Education and Sports at the primary level. The first is the National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE), and the second is the

SACMEQ II. These assessments provide information that can be used to guide policy formulation and review for quality enhancement. In the absence of a better technique of measuring academic achievement, the PLE results, as well as the NAPE and SACMEQ II survey will be used to examine explanations for the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda after a decade of the implementation of the 1997 UPE policy. In the next Section, I examine the regional approach to education and inequality.

2.2.5 Regional Inequality

In Uganda, the problem of regional disparities and inequalities was identified by the Education Policy Review (EPRC) of 1987, and given prominence in the Government White Paper on Education (1992:4), which observed that, 'Disparities between rural and urban areas and regional imbalances in the provision of educational facilities have increased over the years'. Unfortunately, although recognised and made a core objective of the 1997 UPE policy, regional disparities and inequalities have not been addressed adequately. Even after the introduction of UPE in 1997, the MFPEP (2007:2) Briefing Paper 3 noted that: Urban Government schools were better equipped and staffed than those in rural areas. With this picture in mind, the question which arises is: does regional inequality matter? The UNESCO (2008) report on overcoming inequality gives at least three reasons why it matters. First, inequalities are 'intrinsically unfair', second, they 'violate the idea of education as a basic human right', and third, inequalities are inefficient because they reduce the 'opportunities for social and economic progress. The causes of regional inequality are not readily generalisable, but their effects are a matter of concern for politicians and ordinary citizens as inequalities can pose a threat to national integration. Therefore, examining inequalities at the regional level may yield some positive insights. The following are some of the noteworthy causes of regional inequality that have been advanced.

First, most debates on regional inequalities tend to be ahistorical in nature, (Foster 1980:26) however studies have indicated that inequalities are cross-generational (UNESCO 2008). In Uganda, a commonly held view is that the regional educational disparities stem from historical factors. The first phase of the colonial administration was characterised by concentration of administrative

efforts and education investment in the Central regions of Uganda, where most of the first wave of schools were built. The Minister of Education and Sports highlights this aspect of the evolution of education in the country, pointing out that the factors behind the disparities, 'include historical ones such as the presence and influence of missionaries' (MoES 2005:13). Although the Minister attributes this to the 'initiative' of communities, the people of Buganda benefited most because infrastructure set up by the colonial Government and the post colonial Governments have ensured the domination of this region in the education system to this day. The best schools are centrally located mostly around Kampala, Wakiso, Mukono, Luwero and Mpigi (MoES 2005). This region continues to outperform other regions in all educational indicators, and sends the highest number of students to public institutions of post primary and tertiary education.

With the introduction of UPE in 1997, it was expected that these inequalities would be redressed. This legacy of intergenerational inequality seems to have persisted. The best schools are still the 'traditional schools', set up by missionaries, and the new top private schools set up by private entrepreneurs with most of the schools situated in the affluent Central region. Entry to these schools is still very competitive, according to Odada (2005) based, on performance and ability to finance extra costs, factors which are beyond the ability of children from poor households. In short, historical factors still play a key role in the regional educational and poverty inequalities experienced today.

Geographical factors provide another cause for the regional inequalities in Uganda. The Minister of Education and Sports, Bitamazire observed that 'the geographically poorer areas in terms of soils and climate tend to have fewer schools than the relatively richer areas' (MoES 2005:13). Odaet and Bbuye (1997:25) observe that, '[t]he general pattern is that the poorer regions are ill-provided with educational institutions'. Moreover, schools in the poor areas are likely to suffer from poor staff morale and may have difficulties in recruiting teachers, due to their geographic location in remote, hard to reach areas. For one reason, Mukwaya *et al.*, (2008) observe that, although the country does not operate explicit and quantified systems of designating regions, regional disparities in economic and social development are particularly acute and nowhere are they more marked than in the contrast between the Kampala region

and the rest of the country. An imaginary line drawn from East to West reveals the cleavage that roughly divides Uganda into the prosperous South (enlivened by the influence of Kampala) and a “poor” Northern Region - that has suffered from what Hansen *et al.*, (1988) cited by Mukwaya *et al.*, refers to as the impact of uneven development and, subsequently, marginalisation in political and economic terms.

A further argument for using regions as the unit of analysis is the long standing link between the *inequalities and politics*. In the context of African politics, Shorter (2001:19) argues that politics is based on ‘ethnic allegiances and power bases’ where those in power provide ‘favours inter-ethnically’ for each others’ clients. It is not an understatement, when Simon Appleton observes that, the tension between the poverty discourse of Ugandan politics and the latent regionalism of political loyalties means that regional differences in poverty are potentially highly significant (2003). For instance, the Western and Central regions that dominated political power when the UPE policy was launched in the 1990s prospered, while the Northern and North-Eastern regions, who were least represented in the political hierarchy of the country lagged behind in poverty and the education indicators, at a time when Uganda experienced one of the highest rates of per capita growth in the world averaging 3.2 per cent. Appendix VII elaborates this more clearly. Uganda, like other developing countries, shares this common problem of regional inequalities owing to marginalisation and discrimination due to patronage driven politics that is highly regionalised. The educational and poverty inequality in the decade studied is a reflection of the visible political dichotomy in the country between the largely Bantu South and the Nilotic North.

Linked to the politics are the regional poverty inequalities caused by the impact of *insecurity* on education. The participatory poverty assessments (PPA) in Uganda noted that insecurity was the main cause of poverty in the North and North-Eastern regions (Narayan 2002). The depletion of assets and the economic base (livestock) due to the armed conflict spanning two decades means that even though UPE is ‘free’, the costs associated with schooling are unaffordable to these poor and impoverished families. Generations of children grew up in the internally displaced people’s (IDP) camps, in the North and North-East while the Southern (West and Central) regions were relatively peaceful. In these regions,

two thirds of the pupils who enrolled in P1 are unlikely to complete P7 (UNDP HDR 2007: 55) due to the cost of education, indifference/lack of interest to attend, and sicknesses like HIV/AIDS (children and/or parents). MFPED (2004) cited in Higgins (2009) corroborated this observation, recognising insecurity as a significant challenge for the Government of Uganda, as the conflict resulted in the unequal access to public services including education and basic infrastructure (International Monetary Fund - IMF 2010).

One of the unfortunate realities is that regional inequalities in Uganda are not merely political in nature, *but education* itself is a cause of these regional inequalities. Sinclair (2002:123) citing Tawil (1997) and Bush and Saltarelli (2000) observes that: '[t]here is now an increasing awareness that education can be a divisive factor in society, in some instances leading to violent conflict'. This can arise, she argues, when access is limited to certain groups and regions due to discrimination. It is these inequities and inadequacies within the education system that can push young people towards conflict. For instance, Østby *et al.*, (2006:6) observe that:

Members of disadvantaged groups and regions are likely to feel frustration and antagonism, especially when their relative deprivation is the result of actual exploitation and discrimination, which is apparently often the case (for example in Senegal and Uganda).

Globally, it is estimated that there are 72 million children out of school (Save the Children Alliance, 2008). Of these more than half are in countries suffering or emerging from conflict. The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011 states that: 'In conflict-affected poor countries, 28 million children of primary school age are out of school - 42% of the world total'. This (EFA GMR) report further notes that: 'Over the decade to 2008, thirty-five countries experienced armed conflict, of which thirty were low income and lower middle income countries. The average duration of violent conflict episodes in low income countries was twelve years' (UNESCO 2011:2). The conflict in the wider North of Uganda lasted throughout the decade of study 1997-2007, with a combined duration of conflict stretching to over two decades.

The North and North-East regions of Uganda are now emerging out of the conflict, but they are faced with serious challenges to resettle IDPs after decades in camps. Infrastructure was destroyed either through direct fighting or neglect and disrepair by both sides of the conflict. The GOU PRDP (2007) designed for the Northern regions articulated the interventions and the cost required to help the conflict and post conflict regions of the country to move out of extreme poverty, and closer to the rest of the country in terms of development in general and education in particular. But extreme poverty remains the major obstacle.

The *extreme poverty* between regions, as noted is another reason for using regions as the unit for assessing poverty in Uganda. The IMF (2010:3) underlines that, 'Uganda has achieved an impressive record of prudent macroeconomic management and structural reform over the last two decades'. In any case, '[m]any of the best practices in development economics were first piloted in Uganda, including poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs), medium-term expenditure frameworks (MTEFs), and sectorwide approaches (SWAs)'. Yet, Uganda still experiences a challenging task because of the tension between strong macroeconomic outcomes and limited progress on a range of social indicators. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) report (2009) revealed that poverty had declined across the country from 39 per cent in 2002 to 31 per cent in 2005. Most of this decline was reported mainly in Central and Western regions, while Northern and North-Eastern Uganda indicated a majority of people living in poverty. The data from the UBOS indicate that 64 per cent of the people in Northern Uganda live below the poverty line, followed by Eastern Uganda at 38 per cent; Central Uganda has 19 per cent while the Western region is at 19 per cent. Inequality between regions remains high, contributing to high overall inequality (World Bank 2008:2).

While UPE means that families do not have to pay fees, uniforms or schools materials (Higgins 2009), the Uganda MDG Report (2007:19) underlines that, '[e]xtra charges and fees imposed by schools namely, examination fees, interview fees, building funds, milling fees, etc inhibit access to Primary education'. Extreme poverty limits the opportunity of participation and positive learning outcomes for children living in the impoverished and deprived regions. Speaking from the America context, Stromquist (2007:207), citing Bachrach and

Boratz, argued that: ‘the dominant forces use their power to exclude certain issues from the political agenda and thus from the decision making process from the beginning’. Therefore, since the issue of regional inequalities is either removed from or underemphasised in the national debate, this is bound to entrench inequality and marginalisation especially for those living in the regionally deprived areas and districts.

Higgins (2009) notes that the universalistic approach to addressing the regional inequalities in education was effective in so far as it increased the enrolments of pupils to schools. Mukwaya *et al.*, (2008) caution that it is inevitable that there has been a great deal of over-generalization, with critically important regional variations overlooked. For example, the Uganda MDG Report (2007:19) notes that:

Although the current enrolment data for Primary schools signify the existence of near gender parity in access to education it masks a lot of socio-economic and regional disparities in education.

The Government has nonetheless intervened by launching projects that address the regional inequalities. The ramifications on gender are elaborated more clearly based on the fieldwork findings, in Section 4.5.2. In the next section, further analysis and implications of issues affecting the 1997 UPE policy are discussed.

2.2.6 Implications for UPE

PRSPs, PEAP and National Development Plan (NDP)

The World Bank led anti-poverty plans or the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), and the Fast Track Initiatives (FTI) which were developed in the late 1990s and in 2000 are the reason for the inclusion of poverty elements in the education plans in developing countries. Uganda was the first country to adopt a Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan - (PRSP) (UNESCO 2008). UNESCO (2008:187) observes that Uganda’s PRSP was built on the existing Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) whose: ‘well defined goals and budget commitments aimed at accelerating progress in health, education and the development of rural

infrastructure', with the Education Sector Investment Plan (ESIP) as Uganda's education strategy.

Broadly, the poverty reduction strategy in the first ESIP 1998-2004 is hinged on the following two measures, namely: the elimination of school fees; and, participatory planning (Muhumuza 2007). The Government argued that the removal of school fees through UPE would contribute to poverty reduction by ensuring universal access to basic education, which in turn would break the cycle of poverty. This viewpoint was popularised especially after the Jomtien conference on Education for All (EFA) in 1990 when it was understood that by making Primary education free, this strategy would include children from poor families and thereby perhaps become universal.

The Government insists that these two anti-poverty strategies in education described above have been successful. Critics, however, argue that the Poverty Eradication Action Plan PEAP does not define credible equity targets, for instance, how to bridge inequalities between and within the regions or how to narrow extreme inequalities, most conspicuously between the impoverished North and North-East and the affluent, Central and Western regions. Giffard-Lindsay (2008) cited in UNESCO (2008:190) argues that: 'PRSPs continue to present a summary of education plans'. However, these plans do not sufficiently specify the causes of disadvantage. Therefore, while education policies can make a real difference in extending opportunity, progress in education depends critically on addressing the underlying causes of poverty and inequality outside of the school.

Conceptualisation Paradox

What are the implications of the 1997 UPE policy on education for researchers and policymakers? It is yet too early to accurately assess the impacts of the UPE policy but we know that the most vulnerable and the regionally deprived areas where the poorest families and the most marginalised groups live are faced with challenges and constraints in accessing UPE. For example, Muwanika (2008) observes that although universal Primary education is said to be free, schooling is never free. Studies in Uganda such as SACMEQ II (2005) and other Government reports have noted fees as a barrier to UPE especially among the poorest

households. This brings into scrutiny what we mean by free UPE to understand this paradox.

It is worth noting that Universal Primary education (UPE) is problematic and is often confused with terms like basic education, which in itself is defined to encompass pre-primary, primary and adult education (UNESCO 2001). It is in this context that Eweniyi and Adeniji (2008) argue that there has been a relentless search for the real meaning of basic education. The World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand (in March 1990) came up with a Declaration and Framework of Action, which summarised the concept of basic education and its justifications and mode of operations as follows:

- Basic education is not just schooling, but informal, non-formal and formal education, all fully integrated;
- Basic education is not a package, but a process, the ultimate goal of which is the internationalisation of life-long learning skills;
- Basic education requires the enlarged partnership of Governments and civil society.

Clearly, the concept of basic education calls for an understanding of innovative ways of reaching all groups including those who are usually neglected by the “regular” schools of the official system due to the high levels of poverty, and difficult circumstances (Shaeffer 2010). I expound briefly, on these three concepts: non-formal education, adult education and lifelong learning.

The term *non-formal education* is used in different ways and its scope is more or less broad: sometimes to do with the setting and context of learning, sometimes to do with the methods employed, sometimes mainly relating to whether the work is assessed for credit (Duke and Hinzen 2006). Historically, the non-formal education approach has been both argued for as, a radical and better alternative to the formal system (Illich 1973; Freire 1972; UNESCO 2006), and experienced as an inferior form of schooling to accommodate education crises until the formal system can be improved (Pigozzi 1999; Gathenya 2004; UNESCO 2006; and Preece, 2009). With regard to *adult education*, the vision of Nyerere in the 1967,

Arusha Declaration was viewed within the context of liberation from ignorance and dependency, raising consciousness and inspiring a desire for change. Citing Mulenga (2001), Preece (2008) observes that adult education was embedded in a communitarian concept of *lifelong learning* which is the third concept described as follows. The 2002 UNESCO and MINEDAF VIII Declaration cited in Preece (2008:1) stated that:

Promoting lifelong learning in Africa entails the creation of literate societies, the valuing of local knowledge, talent and wisdom, the promotion of learning through formal and non-formal education, and taking the best advantage of the new information and communication technologies and dividends of globalisation.

The education system should include a full range of formal and non-formal learning opportunities for children, youths and adults with lifelong learning skills given to help consolidate basic knowledge and competencies learned in school or from local knowledge, yet this thesis underlines the overwhelming weight attached to primary and secondary schooling, while non-formal, adult education and lifelong learning is neglected. It was reported for example that about 90 per cent of Uganda's educational sector is funded by donors and 65 per cent of these funds go to the primary subsector (Muhumuza 2007). This, is in spite of, the credible evidence from Government sources to indicate that UPE may not have reached the most disadvantaged because the strategies of delivering are not suited nor flexible enough to meet the needs of these vulnerable children, youths and adults.

Preece (2007:4), citing UNESCO (2002), rightly observed that the 'emphasis is often on basic education and literacy rather than on the broader vision of adult education and lifelong learning'. This is perhaps because, there is lack of understanding about the contributing role of adult education to poverty reduction as a tool for development. She (Preece 2007:13) observes that:

The paradoxical experience of poor people in highly industrialised countries, where both primary and secondary education are already compulsory, demonstrates that education needs to be lifelong and lifewide - thus embracing adult education in all its forms.

Integrating Formal, Non-Formal and Lifelong Learning

Formal, non-formal, adult education and lifelong learning are an integral part of learning for all, yet the former are not prioritised. Lamenting the neglect of non-formal education and alternative education approaches, Farrell and Hartwell (2008) argue that Governments always concentrate on formal education and place less emphasis on non-formal education or adult education and lifelong learning. Unfortunately, there are no signs that things are changing. This stratified system of formal schooling serves to perpetuate inequality through selection and certification (Biraimah 2008) as indicated earlier.

Preece (2007), citing the Africa Commission (2005), argues that there is renewed interest in the role of education beyond the MDGs and universal Primary education, due to this failure of UPE to reach all children, young people and adults within Uganda. Eilor (2005:50-52) writes that: '[a] considerable body of research on education and UPE lays clearly the challenges of reaching adequate education to the marginal groups in the poor areas and the need for the formulation of strategies for education for disadvantaged children'. The extent to which non-UPE interventions are themselves inclusive has not adequately been evaluated or studied. They need to be evaluated in terms of: being alternative basic and adult education initiatives; whether they are being managed as an educational question; and how they interface with the formal sector and the benefits thereof to the children in poor rural areas. We also need to investigate whether they are complementary or competing (UNESCO, MFPED and MoES 2005).

In summary, the main cause of regional inequality is poverty which creates barriers for poor people trying to access 'free' UPE. The second barrier is the failure to consider the merits of non-formal education, adult education and lifelong learning in their own right. While the central message of this sub-Section is that education remains poorly integrated in the implementation of poverty reduction, this literature review has provided the basis for a fuller critique of the policy integration of UPE and poverty. Having reviewed these competing variables, it is then critical to assess how basic education can be made all-encompassing to include not only NFE but also to ensure that lifelong-learning and adult education are fully integrated and complementary to each other

through systematic linkages with formal education. I will argue for the building of a successful basic education programme in Uganda by means of providing a balance between the informal, non-formal and formal initiatives. There are however issues surrounding disparities and inequalities that must be addressed to facilitate learning for all. These are discussed next.

2.3 Issues Surrounding Regional Disparities since the Launching of the UPE Policy

Prior to the launch of the UPE policy in 1997, Odaet (in World Bank, 1990) argued that among the issues facing education in Uganda was the widening gap between the educational programmes offered in schools and institutions and the actual openings available for school graduates in the employment market. The 1992 Government White Paper arrived at the same conclusion and criticised previous Governments for ‘expansion without proper planning’. Ironically, Oyen (2002:75) observes that in many developing countries, the approach for universalising education was that: ‘[l]et us ensure that all children are enrolled, the quality of education can be taken care of later’. In the words of one writer, ‘the systems of education now found in developing countries still resemble those that preceded them. They have expanded more than they have changed’ (Ward 1974; Fargarind and Saha 1989:53).

Experienced educators, including donors who financed the education reform in Uganda in the 1990s, supported the gradual approach to the universalisation of Primary education. However, the sudden elimination of fees in 1997, through what has been referred to as the ‘big bang’, was accompanied by shocks to the education system especially in regard to the deterioration in all the quality aspects - which has impacted negatively on the equity objectives of the 1997 UPE policy. In the next Section, I will assess these impacts from the: socio-political attributes, economic attributes, parental education level and school attributes. These focus areas will help us to gain a better understanding of the social issues surrounding regional disparities since the launching of UPE, discussed as follows:

2.3.1 Socio-Political Attributes

Historically, education was elitist, and was enjoyed exclusively by children of chiefs and those people who lived in the urban areas (MoES 2005). It is argued that, regional inequalities in education in Uganda stem from the colonial era when, Western style education, was introduced in 1877. Uganda gained her independence from the British on the 9th of October 1962, and since then Uganda has witnessed dramatic changes in her political system (SACMEQ II 2005). The first Obote administration attempted to close the gap in the regional inequalities, by confronting the institutions that perpetuated inequality. Black *et al.*, (1999) argue that the Government focused on secondary and tertiary education to fulfil the manpower gap at independence due to the shortage of qualified people by, providing access to the elite and non-elite. In 1963, the Government appointed the Castle Commission to review the education system and focus on producing enough qualified people to fill all jobs in the country to help boost the economy (Ssekamwa 2000).

The Castle Commission (1963) presented the post independence Government with a blueprint, to equalise the education opportunity for all Ugandan children. It is noted that at this time, due to the committee's recommendations, education increased access to the non-elite. President Milton Obote was deposed by General Idi Amin, in 1971. The new Government went on to implement the Third Five Year Development Plan, 1972-1976, and later the Education Policy Review Commission of 1977. President Idi Amin was removed from power in 1979 by forces supported by the Tanzanian army. Five years later, the fledgling Obote II administration was deposed from power through a *coup d'état* in 1985 by General Tito Okello, who was in turn removed from power in 1986 by President Yoweri Museveni. This political instability in the 1970s and 1980s affected progress in education. One year after assuming power, President Museveni set up the Education Policy Commission of 1987 to review the education system. One of the key recommendations of this process, as articulated in the Government of Uganda White Paper of Education (1992), was to set 2003 as the year in which Primary education in Uganda would be universal, with a promise to eliminate disparities and inequalities in the education system.

Driven by the political imperatives of the 1996 electoral campaigns, UPE was launched in 1997. The launching of UPE indicated the emphasis of shifting from secondary and tertiary levels of education to Primary education as outlined in the ESIP 1998-2004. The 1997 UPE policy registered increases in terms of enrolments, yet despite these achievements, there are many challenges which continue to impact negatively on this policy. These are manifested in the deterioration of quality clearly revealed in the grades scored by pupils who sat for PLE and the NAPE national proficiency tests for the cohorts of Primary leavers between 1997 and 2007. Grogan (2008), citing Nakibuuka (2004), reports that in 2003 the registration for the Primary school Leaving Examination (by the first UPE cohort) were far below the levels that UPE enrolment figures had predicted. A Poverty Elimination Action Plan revision paper, written by the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports(2003) found that only 33 per cent of the 1997 UPE cohort had reached Primary 6 by 2002, and only 22 per cent had reached Primary 7 by 2003.

Many Primary school pupils in UPE schools in the poor and remote regions and districts failed to qualify for free secondary education, introduced in 2007, because of poor learning outcomes in the PLE terminal results. Olema (2005) notes that the inequitable learning outcomes between and within regions has been created as a result of the decades of insecurity in the North of Uganda. Citing Barton and Mutiti (1998:40) he argues that:

Children in some of the Northern districts spend less than half a day in school because of insecurity. Yet, the children from both environments are subjected to the same examinations that determine access to higher levels of education.

Most of these children fail to attain the cut-off mark of 28 credits, which is the lowest grade for the universal secondary education. Further, net enrolment remains low, mostly in the poor, remote, regions in the North and Karamoja while the retention rates and academic attainments are poor. UPE registered high dropout rates, with the national average for cohorts who completed the seven year Primary cycle standing at 27 and 26 per cent respectively. The low net enrolment, poor retention and stagnation of completion rates will hinder Uganda's achievement of the MDGs and EFA targets. Mukwaya *et al.*, (2008)

argue that the failure of previous poverty interventions was the politicisation of the interventions especially since they were established during the period of elections. Likewise, the UPE policy was not only politicised, but was also a hastily made up electoral pledge made during the 1996, electoral campaigns. Therefore, the persistent issues of equity, access, quality and efficiency and relevance (which are a policy thrust prioritised by the Ministry of Education and Sports) have been undermined due, to, the politicisation of the policy.

2.3.2 Economic Attributes

The spatial variations in the economy in Uganda may be explained by three factors. First, Uganda's growth in the 1990s can be viewed as recovery from disaster, rather than growth *per se*. By 2000, the economy was only just returning to the levels of income per capita that it had enjoyed in the early 1970s (Collier and Gunning 1999 cited by Mukwaya *et al.*, 2008). In the intervening period, poor economic policies and civil war in the wider North of Uganda undermined the formal economy. When a stable economic policy framework and security were restored, there was more scope for the formal economy to grow, more so, in urban than urban and rural areas, which may also help to explain the better performance of rural areas in the Central region (UBOS 2002, 2006 and 2009).

A second factor impacting on the economy is *security*. The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011 observes that there is convincing evidence that conflict strongly reinforces the disadvantages associated with poverty and gender. The slow growth of the North, and to some extent, the Eastern region reflects the fact that security improved much less in those regions than elsewhere in the country (Mukwaya *et al.*, 2008). Safer areas performed better in the terminal Primary leaving examinations, while the insecure districts performed poorly throughout the decade studied. The upshot is that, armed conflict held back overall progress in education and reinforced national inequalities. This study therefore notes that, conflict often implies a loss of assets and income for the poorest households, forcing families to take children out of school due to lack of resources to cover the hidden costs of 'free' education. Good quality education however is critical to overcoming the economic despair that often contributes to violent conflict (UNESCO 2011:3).

A third factor to explain the economic attributes is the export of coffee, Uganda's leading cash crop. According to UNDP HDR (2007) and Mukwaya et al., (2008), the localized impact of the coffee boom of 1994/95 when the unit value for Ugandan coffee exports rose to \$2.55 per kilo compared to \$0.82 in 1992/93 impacted on the socio-economic wellbeing of the coffee growing regions. Coffee growing only accounts for a sizeable share of income in Western and Central regions of Uganda - it is not grown in the North, which relied mostly on cotton. The global demand for cotton fell due to the reliance on synthetic products. This, had an effect on the regional disparities in educational attainments, as parents in the well-off districts and regions could afford the extra costs of schooling for their children with less difficulties due to their better economic circumstances, while the regions that relied on cotton did not prosper or improve their economic circumstances and therefore were constrained to support extra costs for accessing UPE.

The UNDP HDR (2007) Report elaborated in Table 2.3, depicts the welfare disparities by region, and indicates that the North and North East trail the Central and Western regions in poverty indicators, therefore economic wellbeing.

Table 2.1. Welfare indicators by region

Region	Poverty 2005/06 (%)	Annual average Population growth (1991-2006) (%)	Fertility (births per woman 2000) (%)	Dwelling type - hut (2005/06) (%)	Ownership of mobile phone (2005/06) (%)
Central	16.4	2.6	5.7	3	23
East	35.9	3.5	7.4	31	11
North	60.7	4.2	7.9	68	5
West	31.1	3.2	-	22	17

Source: Regional Forecasts (2007:12) based on UBOS Population and Housing Censuses 1991 and 2002, National Household Survey 2005/06 and Uganda Demographic Household Survey 2000.

Economic attributes cannot be delinked from parental Education in explaining the level of the regional educational and poverty disparities in Uganda, which

are a reflection of the broader socio-economic inequalities in the country. This is discussed next.

2.3.3 Parental Education Level

Parental education matters, parents' education or parents income levels may influence the students schooling (access, attainment or performance) (Kotani, 2004). In Uganda, the majority of households whose heads had no education are poor, except in Central region, where only 47 per cent of those without education are poor (Okurut *et al.*, 2002). Further, it is observed that, there is a significant difference in the poverty status of households, according to the different levels of educational attainment of the household head, in all regions. '[t]he UNHS reports that 20 per cent of Ugandans have no formal education at all. In the poorest quintile of Ugandans, 35 per cent have had no formal education' (World Bank 2008:58). Okidi and Mckay (2003:8) observe that:

people without formal education headed 43 per cent of the chronically poor households during 1992 to 1996... On the contrary, people with high school or university education headed about 17 per cent of the households that maintained their welfare above the poverty line... Specifically, households whose heads had a given level of education appeared to be unlikely to have other members whose education levels deviated significantly above that of the head.

Therefore, the higher the educational level, the greater the proportion of non-poor households within the sample. This finding seems to support the fact that a certain minimum level of education is essential for increasing household productivity and income earning potential as evidenced by Grootaert (1997 cited in Okurut *et al.*, 2002). Indeed, parental income has been demonstrated to have an influence on student performance with children from well-to-do families being positively correlated with higher test scores (Hanushek 2003; Kasirye, 2009). Rich parents are making school choices that benefit their children. Parents with ability to pay fees are enrolling their children in private schools, where monitoring of learning is regular and taken seriously.

In Uganda, Northern Uganda stands out. It is the poorest region, and has the lowest indicators in terms of parental education attainment. A very high percentage (73.8 per cent) of the households in Northern Uganda whose heads had no education are poor and 58.1 per cent of Northern Uganda households whose heads had secondary education are poor, compared with 25.9 per cent in Central, 28.8 per cent in Western and 42.7 per cent in Eastern regions (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2. Percentage distribution of households by educational attainment of the household head and region based on the national poverty line

	Central region		Eastern region		Western region		Northern region	
	Poor	Non poor	Poor	Non Poor	poor	Non Poor	Poor	Non Poor
No education	47.0	53.0	59.6	40.4	51.6	48.4	73.8	26.2
Primary	40.6	59.4	58.9	41.1	43.5	56.5	72.3	27.7
Secondary	25.9	74.1	42.7	57.3	28.8	71.2	58.1	41.9
Tertiary	12.3	87.7	22.9	77.1	18.3	81.7	39.7	60.3
Regional	36.9	63.1	54.0	46.0	42.6	57.4	69.1	30.4

Source: Okurut *et al.*, (2002:17)

The evidence tends to confirm the argument that there is a link between educational attainment, the income earning potential of the household and poverty (Okurut *et al.*, 2002). Economic advantage is thus increasingly becoming a strong predictor of education achievement, not just in developed countries, but also in developing ones. The illiterate and parents with low levels of education tend to resist modern ideas, innovation and technology, so that a certain minimum level of education is necessary to enhance appreciation and adoption of new technologies that can be instrumental in increasing household productivity, hence earning more income. At the individual level, low learning achievement not only limits one's progression further in school but also negatively affects an individual's future income and productivity (Hanushek and Pace 1995). In summary, while access has improved in many parts of the country, net enrolments rates remain extremely low in some parts, mostly affected is Karamoja region and the wider North, which are also lagging behind

the rest of the country. These parts of the country also have the lowest indicators of literacy and hence, low parental education levels (Okurut *et al.*, 2002).

2.3.4 School Attributes

The school effects research traces its origins to two major studies carried out in the United States by Coleman *et al.*, (1966) and Jencks *et al.*, (1972). The equivalent of this study, for a developing country, was carried out in the 1970s by Heyneman in Uganda. Gamoran and Long (2007:31) noted that: '[w]ith his 1975 *Coleman Report from a Non-industrialised Society*, Heyneman's study of education in Uganda heralded the study of school effects internationally'. Coleman's ground breaking 1966 study found that there may be fewer effects of school resources on advancement in rich countries, but stronger effects in poorer countries. The study by Kasirye (2009), using the data set from SACMEQ II in Uganda, confirmed this finding revealing that, access to classroom resources raises children's cognitive outcomes; a child having their own space to sit significantly impacts on learning outcomes.

A limitation of the school effects research according to Montagnes (2001), cited by Gamoran and Long (2007:31), is that: 'schools in many developing countries face shortages of basic teaching materials such as textbooks' relative to those in developed economies. In addition, classrooms are lacking in most cases, as suggested by Johnson and Beinart (2008) and Kasirye (2009) among others. Therefore, the generalisations of these studies on school effects in developing countries versus developed countries raises questions. For example, Foster and Hammersley (1996:159) citing Coleman and Jencks argue that, although: 'research on school effects provides some evidence for differences among schools in their impact on students' educational achievement', school effects literature has neglected important questions regarding how schools impact on learning achievement in developing countries, largely due to data limitations and a lack of qualitative school-based research in the contexts of the developing regions. While the school effects research from the US and Europe is fairly well advanced, more work however is needed in developing countries to demonstrate how school effects are a predictor of educational achievement in the context of under resourced and poor quality schools.

Theorising on the role of public education in the reproduction of the persistent inequalities in Latin America, Stromquist (2007:209), writing on the Peruvian context argues that: '[e]ducation also generates a dislike for rural life or lack of fit with it, driving migration toward urban areas'. Julius Nyerere (1968:73) writing from the Tanzanian perspective observed that: 'our Primary school graduates should be able to fit into, and to serve, the communities from which they come'. This is written with the understanding that most African societies are largely rural. To address the regional disparities since the launching of UPE, the Government focused its efforts on two strategic directions: reforming the UPE policy, and adopting special measures to reduce inequalities and disparities. The next two sections describe what these strategic initiatives entail followed by a description of the policy impact of the reforms.

2.4 Strategic Reforms Adopted to Address the Shortcomings of UPE

Scholarly work providing an account of the reforms in Uganda since the launching of the UPE policy in 1997 has grown over the years, it includes: McGee (2000), Moulton *et al.*, (2002), Deininger (2003), Dauda (2004), Higgins and Rwanyange (2005), Nishimura *et al.*, (2008); Grogan (2008); and Altinyelken (2009) etc. It is likely that such work is likely to grow given that politicians, anti-poverty campaigners, policy makers and researchers are still interested in the UPE and poverty policy initiatives with a renewed focus on the MDGs with equity (UNICEF 2010, 2011). In this Section, I will outline the strategic imperatives designed by the Ministry of Education and Sports to respond to the shortcomings of the UPE policy, in the context of the growing regional inequalities. Some of the most significant reforms are: the thematic curriculum for lower primary; the Customised Performance Targets (CPTs) for Head Teachers and Deputies; the Quality Enhancement Initiative (QEI); Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy; School feeding and food; automatic promotion; and other donor-led policy imperatives, such as the shift systems introduced to address the challenges caused by the access shock created by the elimination of fees (Grogan 2008).

2.4.1 Thematic Curriculum for Lower Primary

The new curriculum for Primary schools, called the ‘thematic curriculum’, was developed and piloted in Primary 1 in 90 selected schools in 11 districts starting from February 2006. After the pilot phase, the thematic curriculum was launched nationwide in February 2007. The Ministry of Education and Sports, Education and Sports Sector Annual Programme Review (2007:7) noted that the thematic curriculum for lower primary, was, intended to stem the rapidly declining proficiency levels of primary pupils. The introduction of the new thematic curriculum was based on three main principles: Rapid development of literacy, numeracy and life skills at lower primary; the treatment of concepts holistically, under themes of immediate meaning and relevance to the learner; and the presentation of learning experiences in languages in which the learners are already proficient (National Curriculum and Development Centre - NCDC 2006a, cited by Altinyelken 2009:154).

The new curriculum covers almost the same areas that existed in the 2000 Curriculum. However, the content is arranged differently into knowledge and competencies to turn learning outcomes into competencies, life skills and values. It also adopts a ‘child-centred approach’ by putting the child’s interests, experience and needs at the centre of the curriculum. This approach helps to avoid content overlaps and repetition that existed in the subject-based curriculum. Thus, although a theme-based approach is used in the curriculum for primary one, two and three, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) observes that, subject-based curriculum will remain at upper levels (NCDC 2006a, cited by Altinyelken 2009).

A key feature of the thematic curriculum is the emphasis on the local language or mother tongue as the medium of teaching and learning. Previously, the medium of instruction was English in urban schools, while the local language was the language of instruction in the rural schools (GoU 1992; Odaet *et al.*, 1997; Tomasevski 1999). In the new thematic curriculum, English is the language of instruction in schools in which there is no predominant local language or area language (Altinyelken 2009). This language of instruction policy under the ‘thematic curriculum’ generated a lot of controversy because its implementation was unfair. This policy was viewed as discriminatory, because it promoted

teaching in the ‘dominant’ area languages in cosmopolitan areas, while marginalising children from the ethnolinguistic minorities. The selection of a local language as the language of instruction at school has financial, staffing and training as well as political implications. There are 54 language groups in Uganda, and all these could potentially be languages of instruction. Cultural and political considerations assume huge importance particularly in districts with various sometimes rival, competing languages (illustrated in Enyutu 2005 cited by Altinyelken 2009:155).

Since language is at the heart of the thematic curriculum, implementing the ‘child-centred’ approach is problematic due to the linguistic divergences and the absence of effective District Language Boards or materials in local languages to implement the local language in schools. Kitembo (2008) observed that the linguistically diverse classes make it hard for teachers to teach using an agreed local language as a medium of instruction thus hindering communication during teaching and learning. He observes that the multiethnic mix of students and teachers led to the misinterpretation of many concepts in the classrooms by teachers. Therefore, it could be argued that the thematic curriculum has made teaching less children-centred and stifled diversity by selecting and promoting ‘dominant’ languages.

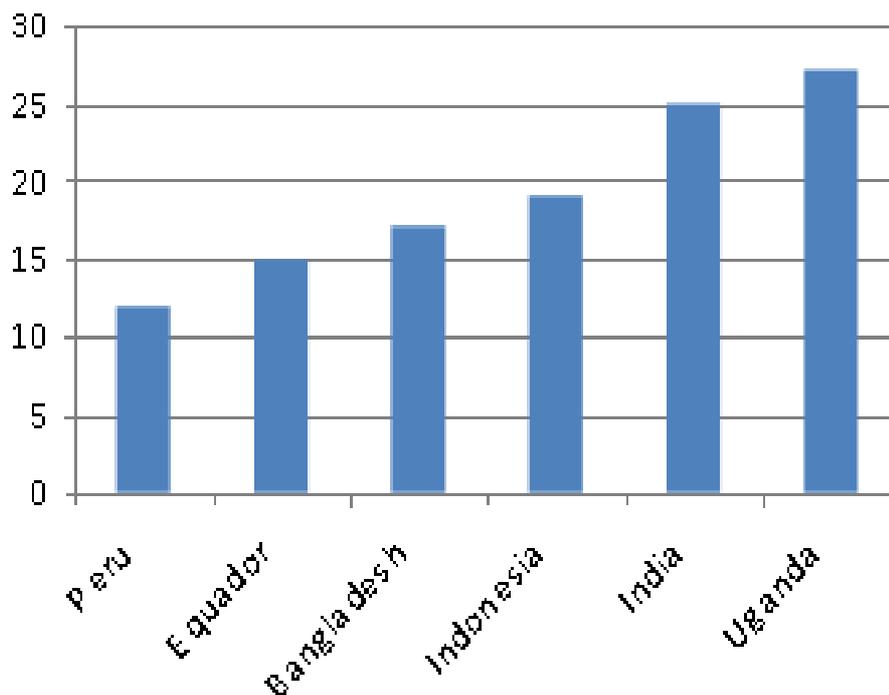
In sum, the thematic curriculum fails to meet the two principles of equity: fairness and inclusiveness, in spite of its many laudable goals and objectives because it potentially excludes minority linguistic rights in the cosmopolitan classrooms. The thematic curriculum contradicts the goals for equity outlined in the 1997 UPE policy, and the mission of the Ministry of Education and Sports for national integration, which was also the stated goal of the Kajubi Report of the Education Policy Review Commission (GoU 1989) and the recommendations of the 1992 White Paper.

2.4.2 Customised Performance Targets (CPTs) for Head Teachers and their Deputies

The Customised Performance Targets (CPTs) were instituted as a measure of curbing teacher absenteeism (MoES 2009:112). Recent studies have found that teacher absenteeism is on the increase attributed to factors such as ‘lack of

commitment’ on the part of headteachers and teachers in UPE schools. A study of teacher absenteeism in nine developing countries found that, on any given day, 11-30 per cent of teachers were absent from their posts (Fuehrer et al., 2006 cited in Mucosa et al., 2009). Further, ‘In a recent study of six countries, teacher absenteeism rates in Primary schools averaged 19 per cent and ran as high as 25 per cent in India and 27 per cent in Uganda’ (Chaudhury *et al.*, 2006 cited by UNESCO 2008:120). In Uganda, it was noted that ‘absenteeism varies by rank’, ‘with 27 per cent of head teachers, 16 per cent of senior teachers and 14 per cent of junior teachers, being absent’ (Kibuuka and Kirumira 2008:2). The Figure 2.2 presents an analysis of absenteeism, which has impacted negatively on the UPE policy.

Figure 2.2. Teacher absenteeism rates in selected countries



Source: Chaudhury *et al.*, (2006) cited in UNESCO (2008)

The magnitude of teacher absenteeism is so large that reducing it became a principal focus of Government efforts to improve efficiency in Primary education (Winkler and Sondergaard 2008). The CPT strategy, is one of the interventions aimed at improving the quality of education under the UPE programme by,

enhancing the performance of head teachers to ensure compliance to set learning achievement targets. Under this arrangement, head teachers and their deputies have the responsibility for school-level supervision of the teaching and learning process. A major challenge of the CPT is that a number of districts/Local Governments have remained complacent, yet the implementation of the policy rests on their good-will (MoES 2007:9). Local Governments are required to monitor the performance and take action against those head teachers who are not performing. The underlying structural issues, particularly the problem of hardship in remote areas, have compelled teachers to divert attention from core classroom responsibilities to income generation (Government of Qatar *et. Al.*, 2010), a factor which may have contributed to the problem of teacher absenteeism and lack of commitment to teaching.

The Quality Enhancement Initiative (QEI) was introduced and implemented as part of an overall strategy to address the performance of teachers and attract children to school in the districts participating in the CPT. QEI is examined next.

2.4.3 Quality Enhancement Initiative (QEI)

The Quality Enhancement Initiative (QEI) was introduced by the Ministry of Education and Sports in 2009 on a pilot basis in 1,804 UPE schools in 12 selected districts with the worst performance in national exams. The participating districts were Nakapiripirit, Kaabong, Oyam, Amuru, Arua, Nebbi, Bududa, Bukedea, Kyenjojo, Buliisa, Lyantonde and Mubende districts, mostly in the North and East and in central Uganda (Nkaada 2010). The strategic aim of this initiative was to strengthen accountability of stakeholders for children's learning outcomes, enhance school level supervision, and institute legal policy positions that directly impact on the teaching and learning processes in schools. Nkaada (2010) notes that, in order to hold the selected districts accountable, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry of Education and Sports and the Ministry of Local Government and Local Governments i.e. Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) to ensure that the aims of the QEI are met. Besides the core issues of quality and drop-outs, the QEI was introduced as part of a strategy to address the huge disparities in performance between schools in urban and rural areas, and the disparities between the underperforming districts and the advanced districts, by investing in improving the quality of learning

through building more classrooms, training more teachers and providing some teaching materials. The other policy actions relating to quality improvement such as the review of teacher education curriculum, learning materials, textbook development and distribution have not been adequately funded (World Bank, 2008).

Equity and quality are complementary. The UNESCO (2004) summary report asserts that, quality must be judged in the mirror of equity. An education system that is characterised by gender inequality or discrimination against a particular group on ethnic or cultural grounds is not high quality. Therefore, the persistence of inequalities between regions and the Government's response through the QEI is a show of solidarity and the commitment to redress the imbalances that have grown in the past decade since the launching of the UPE programme. It is early yet to make an assessment of the impacts of the QEI as data is scanty. These new imperatives face severe resource constraints and we can only wait to see how these interventions and the QEI will impact on quality; and ultimately to reducing inequity in the school system.

2.4.4 Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy

Early Childhood Care and Development for children up to 8 years (MoES 2010) is one of the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Education and Sports for expanding school readiness and learning, indicated clearly in Section 1.5.3 on the Mission and Vision of the Ministry of Education and Sports. The science of brain development shows that, 'to develop properly, a child's growing brain needs nurturing long before formal school starts at age 6 or 7' (World Bank 2011:viii). This provides the child with the foundational skills that make it possible for lifelong learning. It is common knowledge that many children in Uganda enter Primary school with little preparation for the intellectual tasks it requires. The Education Sector Assessment for 2009/2010 observes that, 'enrolment of younger children in ECD remains very low despite a high population growth rate of 3.2% (i.e. in 2009, a total of 3,434,108 children were aged 3 to 5 years yet only 234,428 (7%) children were enrolled in pre-primary)' (MoES 2010:107). The few children who are ready to learn come mostly from families in which their parents have either gone to school or the home environment provides exposure to reading materials or incentives to learn to

read. Table 4.6 reveals the very low enrolments in pre-primary or ECD, which supports the argument that only a select few children from well-to-do families access ECD (MoES 2009).

Currently early childhood development programmes in Uganda are offered by formal centre-based private providers, with most of the nursery schools and kindergartens located in urban areas. Acana (2005: para., 16) offers an explanation:

... the concept and need for nursery school is more well-known in the urban centres. In addition nursery schools in the urban centres are within easy reach for the young children. Besides, more mothers in the urban centres tend to work away from home and so young children are sent to Day Care Centres and Nursery Schools for safe custody. Furthermore, parents in the urban areas may be more able to pay for Nursery schooling than those in the rural areas.

Muwanika (2008) supports this preposition, noting that most of the children in rural schools have not attended pre-Primary school which may affect their school retention, let alone school readiness and learning, which is the essence of ECD. This reality is in agreement with McGinn *et al.*, (1992), cited by Muwanika (2008), who found that pupils with one or more years of pre-school are less likely to drop out before completing the Primary school cycle. The high retention rates in the urban areas could be explained by the socio-economic characteristics of the parents. Parents in the urban areas are not as poor as those in the rural areas therefore they can easily cope with the cost of schooling by providing scholastic materials to their children.

NAPE tests, found that attendance of nursery school had a positive effect on learning achievement. Acana (2005) observes that pupils who had attended nursery school had a higher mean score than the others, particularly in literacy, where the mean was 28 per cent for the former group and 21 per cent for the latter. The UNEB (2003) study cited by Acana (2005) asked P6 pupils if they had attended nursery school, 40 per cent of them replied in the affirmative. Across the two locations, more pupils in the urban schools had attended nursery school: 65 per cent as opposed to 35 per cent in the rural areas. This seemed to suggest

that nursery schools are of value as they may enable the child to learn to socialize and interact with people outside the home. When the children eventually join Primary schools, school is not totally strange to them. In addition many of them would have already learnt very basic literacy and numeracy skills (Acana 2005).

In efforts to improve readiness for learning, the Ministry of Education and Sports produced legislation and provided an environment which would encourage attendance of early childhood education. The Ministry of Education and Sports developed an ECD policy (MoES 2005:15), and prepared guidelines through the Education Act of 2008, which stipulates that:

pre-Primary education is to be run by private agencies or persons to provide education to children aged from two years to five years and the financing of that type of education shall be the responsibility of the parents or guardians.

Although the education sector plans give attention to early childhood development, integration of care, health, education and nutrition is still lacking (MoES 2010:107). Likewise, the ECD programmes focus on academics, with no curricular and pedagogy continuity. ECD is equated to pre-school or nursery schools, with an apparent inclination towards learning. Despite these shortcomings, ECD has its advantages. The benefits of ECD might not be revealed in the short term but, rather the signs are that, children who go through ECD are better prepared to join Primary schools, and this will also impact on their subsequent performance. ECD policies can address inequalities well before Primary school (Burnett 2009). If equity is to be realised, it is important that the Government provides financial resources to support ECD, especially for those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, where ECD is not available due to poverty or in the case of the North and North-East Uganda, due to factors such as insecurity which have exacerbated the inequalities.

2.4.5 School Feeding and Food

Providing *school meals* is one policy that the government has undertaken through her partners. School feeding programmes or the distribution of food through

schools was advocated as a way of addressing barriers to schooling related to poverty. The World Bank (2011:12-13) study citing Bundy and O'Connell (2010) note that, 'programmes that address hunger, malnutrition, and disease among school children significantly improve their academic performance, a reason why school-based feeding health programmes can be valuable in times of drought, economic crisis and natural disaster'. Many children in Uganda drop out of school due to hunger. In East Africa, drought is often the catalyst for reduced nutrition and withdrawal of children from school (UNESCO 2008). The government policy on school feeding is very clear. According to the Education Act (2008:12), the responsibilities of the parents and guardians shall among others include - 'providing food, clothing, shelter, medical care and transport'. However, not all parents are able to provide food for their children. Therefore, the Food for Education programme in Uganda is driven by WFP and other donors, with limited uptake in other parts of the country, not faced by civil conflict and war (Kasirye 2009). The most vulnerable (children in the IDP camps in Uganda) have been targeted, by providing them with take-home rations not only to contribute to the overall family budget, but also to offset in part the opportunity costs for sending children to school (World Bank 2009).

The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011, note that, due to the global food, fuel, and financial crises, millions of the world's poorest people are struggling to cope with the after-effects. 'Slower economic growth, intersecting with higher food prices, left an additional 64 million people in extreme poverty and 41 million more people malnourished in 2009, compared with pre-crisis trends' (UNESCO 2011:12). Three years earlier, even before the global crisis caused by the banking systems and regulatory failures of rich countries, there was a low response to funding for food programmes globally. The sustainability of school feeding programmes in Uganda is a challenge, moreover targeting is difficult, given that a high proportion of children live in poverty.

With the closing of IDP camps in Northern Uganda, there are prospects that education could inevitably suffer. It has not been possible for poor parents, or IDP families to provide food for their children. With the return to their ancestral homes after over two decades, school attendance may be affected in the short term, as hunger will affect school attendance and learning outcomes.

2.4.6 Automatic Promotion

The automatic promotion policy, was another controversial reform under the 1997 UPE policy reforms introduced and implemented to address the shortcomings of the UPE reforms, and the decline in the school completion rates, from 56 per cent in 2002/03 to an alarming 48 per cent in 2006 against a PEAP target of 69 per cent (World Bank 2008:57). The government increased the stock of classrooms, made massive investments in teacher education, and provided textbooks, to tackle the issue of large classes, and poor performance. Donors, who carried the cost of the UPE policy, were concerned as to why the completion rate increased to 60 per cent in 2003/2004, then dropped to 51 per cent in 2004/2005, and declined further to 48 per cent in 2005/2006, even when, the automatic promotion policy is in place (World Bank 2008).

This World Bank report notes that, this is an issue to do with repeaters, whom donors indicated were contributing to the gross wastage of resources. The Government supported this position, acknowledging that repetition of classes' wastes money. The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) (2008) study in Uganda authored by Kemp and Eilor concluded that, the automatic promotion policy impacted negatively on education standards because children were simply promoted to the next grades from one school year to the next without having the basic competencies in literacy and numeracy. Learning outcomes typically require behaviour shifts and mastery of determined knowledge and skills. Participants of this impact study of primary education in Uganda wanted the automatic promotion policy to be reviewed so that children who have not attained the required competencies are compelled to repeat classes, as automatic promotion undermines the general performance of the UPE programme. The IOB (2008:116) report notes that: 'teachers do not support the automatic promotion system and defend repetition by claiming that there is no point in promoting a child if it lacks the knowledge to function effectively at the next grade level'.

This policy reform however appears to have markedly improved the resources available to students and teachers in more recent UPE cohorts as schools were compelled to promote pupils irrespective of their performance. Therefore, the

financing and the donor role in the policy direction of the 1997 UPE reforms is an aspect that we cannot ignore. This is discussed next.

2.4.7 Financing Reforms

The external agencies in Uganda, established the Education Funding Agencies Group (EFAG). This group of donors such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UK Department for International Development (DFID), European Union (EU), Norway, among others, under the EFAG, directly or indirectly facilitated a process that enhanced dialogue between the funders of development programmes with the Ministry of Education and Sports in the UPE policy implementation. It paid off and Uganda was the first country to qualify for the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt relief initiative in 1998. At the macro-level, measures were enhanced further by the introduction of the PEAP in 1997 (Juuko and Kabonero 2007). The revised PEAP (2004) reports that access to essential services improved steadily as a result of the reforms, especially in education, health, water and sanitation.

Donors serviced the cost of free Primary education, through direct funding, but also by the cancellation of Uganda's external debt under the HIPC initiative. Donors also provided support through basket funding to run UPE, by the introduction of the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) and General Budget Support (GBS) (IOB 2010). We cannot avoid the role of donors in shaping the UPE policy in Uganda and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Although many donors were against free UPE (World Bank 2002), with the sudden launch of UPE in 1997, it is donors who had to finance this policy initiative as a poor country like Uganda could not afford the cost of 'free' Primary education. The EFAG was at the forefront, and instrumental not only in financing the education sector but also in shaping the policy direction of UPE, through technical support to assure quality as noted by the Education Abstract 2008 (MoES 2009).

We can see footprints of donors in UPE policy reforms. Even before the launching of the UPE policy, donors had invested heavily in education in Uganda. At the pre-launch of UPE, Primary education was financed through projects such as the Primary Education Reform and Teacher Development (PETDP), and the Support to Primary Education Reform (SUPER) (Moulton *et. al.*, 2002). This support

increased with the ESIP 1998-2003, the ESSP 2004-2014 and 2007-2015. This trend is worrying and the dependency on aid is a challenge that faces Uganda's education system (Odaet. *et al.*, 1997). Indeed, most of these strategic UPE reforms of the 1990s and the 21st century were dependent on donor financing through donor humanitarian assistance and development budgets.

In summary, besides the key strategic reforms discussed in this section, the Government pursued reforms such as the double shifts (different groups attending the same lessons at different times of the day using the same buildings and resources due to lack of space) and other strategic policy imperatives, such as scholarships to bolster UPE quality so as to attain the goals of eliminating disparities and inequalities as set out in the objectives of the 1997 policy. The evidence however, suggests that these universal initiatives did not assure equitable access or learning outcomes between and within regions, especially in the remote and deprived regions. The government attempted to refocus by targeting policies to the wider North, through special measures aimed at responding to the needs of this marginalised region. These reforms, form the core of this thesis, which aims to understand whether or not the 1997 UPE policy eliminated disparities and inequalities in the education system in the decade (1997 to 2007) of reforms. I will review the merits of these special measures and targeted programmes launched by the Government to address the problem of regional inequalities next.

2.5 Special Measures to Reduce Regional Inequalities and Disparities

Special targeted programmes and sector-based projects aimed at improving the condition of the North and North-East have been implemented through the years with the launch of programmes such as the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme (NURP), Karamoja Development Programmes (KDP), the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF Programme I, II and III) and other donor funded humanitarian and development projects. Over two decades of armed rebellion and cattle rustling by Karamojong warriors had virtually brought socio-economic activities to a standstill with thousands of children and teachers displaced, abducted or killed. Livestock was depleted, the agricultural land

turned into wasteland, schools and other social services collapsed as physical facilities deteriorated. 'An estimated one and a half to two million pupils were affected by conflict during 2003 in Northern, North-Eastern and some parts of Western Uganda' (UNDP 2007:19). Therefore, despite the positive developments in the socio-economic indicators in the country in the 1990s and in the early 21st century, the wider North remained the poorest region, lagging behind in all the poverty and education indicators.

With the return of peace, the wider North has entered the crucial stage of post conflict recovery. The Peace, Recovery and Development Strategy (GoU 2007) launched in 2007 to address the regional inequalities, was designed to provide the framework for addressing the causes of conflict and instability in the region. Specifically, in regard to the education sector, the PRDP (2007) aims to provide continued education to the displaced children and adults in the Internally Displaced Persons camps, and prepare for the safe return to their ancestral homes. The Government of Uganda and her partners have also tried to mitigate the high dropout rate experienced in this region attributed to the: hidden cost of education, early pregnancy and early marriage among young girls, poor health, distance barriers (estimated at 3km to 25km on average as the distance from home to school, Education Abstract 2007) (MoES 2008).

There are some tangible improvements in education especially in enrolment. However, many households are still lagging behind the rest of the country in many of the key education indicators and in terms of access, participation, completion and learning outcomes. This reality suggests that the special and targeted projects had some limitations. Some analysts observe that targeting 'may result in unintended effects of excluding vulnerable and marginalised children and their families, particularly where poverty is widespread' (UNICEF, Ortiz, Chai, Cummins, and Vergara 2010:23). This, they argue, is because targeting is costly, administratively complex and requires significant civil service capacity (Mkandawire 2005 cited in UNICEF, Ortiz, et al., 2010) and can lead to significant delays and under coverage. Another limitation is that targeting does not take into account other dimensions of poverty, such as access to schools, water or health facilities. If targeted programmes are properly designed and carried out, it would alert policy makers on the potential pitfalls, impacts or opportunities for different options.

The special targeted programmes outlined in this section demonstrate the Government's commitment to the people in the North and North-Eastern Uganda. However, the persistence of regional inequalities after over a decade of implementation of the 1997 UPE and poverty reforms, highlight how extremely difficult it is for universal programmes that benefit everyone to respond to the specific needs of the most excluded populations where disparities and inequalities are extremely high, and political imperatives and regionalism run high. The World Bank (2008:9) noted that, 'the quickest gains in terms of growth; poverty reduction and improving social indicators can be achieved by directing more resources and services to Northern Uganda'. The PRDP must thus specify and allocate actual additional resources to the local Government to undertake programmes that strengthen education as an empowering and transforming influence to give all children and youths an opportunity to survive, develop, and reach their full potential, without discrimination and bias, or favouritism (UNICEF 2011).

In the next section, I will briefly discuss the policy impact of the UPE and poverty policies in addressing the regional disparities and inequalities, and conclude with a summary of the discussion on the literature reviewed in this Chapter.

2.6 Policy Impact

The above discussions cover most of the aspects that frame the theoretical and empirical background as well as the strategic interventions adopted by the Government to address the regional educational and poverty inequalities in Uganda. However, there are some observable gaps in literature, to demonstrate conclusively the levels of marginalisation and deprivation. Given that only a handful of policy makers and researchers - among them the Government of Uganda White Paper on Education (1992); SACMEQ II (2005); GOU - PRDP (2007); Muwanika (2008); Appleton (2003, 2009); and Higgins (2009) - have addressed the issue of the regional disparities and inequalities in education and poverty, between the largely poor North (North and North East) and the more affluent Southern (West and Central) regions, there is a need for greater scrutiny on inequalities and its impacts on the goal of making education equitable. This type

of enquiry can help us to identify and understand the significance of the 'critical' issues and advocate for changes that need to occur in relation to the 1997 UPE policy.

Policy impacts are clearly difficult to assess, moreover as UNESCO (2008:199) observes: 'Priorities in poverty reduction are not set in a political vacuum'. 'Works in political science (such as Eldman 1988 and Stone 1988) reminds us that politics is shaped by many considerations other than policy, including the requirement to remain in office and the vicissitudes of the moment' (Levin 2000:7). Therefore, Governments do assess constraints, opportunities and political pay-off before formulating policies. Muhumuza (2007:96) for instance observes that the UPE policy is: 'considered populist because it is perceived by many to be "vote catchers" for the Government', as this policy is closely associated with President Yoweri Museveni, and was announced during the highly contested presidential elections of 1996 to counter pledges made by opposition candidates.

In summary, while the 1997 UPE policy may be laudable, the inaccurate assessments of the impact of this policy can only serve to weaken rather than strengthen the case for distributing educational opportunities fairly for all in particular, to the most disadvantaged - for example, along gender, socio-economic status, place of residence, or disability, given that the universal approach that underpins UPE does not appear to be flexible and targeted enough, or take into account the region-specific challenges facing these poor and vulnerable children in the Northern and North-Eastern regions or those groups excluded most within and between regions in education delivery.

This type of empirical inquiry from critical perspectives, using the integrated approach and with more recent data, may yield some important insights about whether the 1997 UPE policy and the poverty strategies have been effective or not in eradicating the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda and to suggest alternatives to the policy interventions.

2.7 Summary of the Literature Review

This review has singled out some important international and national level research on poverty and inequality in Uganda. It has suggested that although poverty and educational inequalities are prominent on the political and academic agendas, it is not clear that the 1997 UPE policy has actually eradicated regional inequalities. The dominant discourses on UPE and poverty eradication in Uganda are, in most cases, self-congratulatory about the success of these policy initiatives. However, a rigorous review of the literature notes that there are significant gaps in knowledge. The literature suggested that the poor learning outcomes for poor children, especially those in the rural, remote and regionally deprived areas, is due to the myriad challenges these disadvantaged groups face in accessing UPE, even when it is provided free. Other literature, however, for instance Deininger (2003) and the SACMEQ II (2005) contradicts some of the findings that the poor benefited most from the UPE policy. The deficiencies in the literature could be attributed partly to the urgency to demonstrate success stories both on the part of the Government and donors. This then, is socially constructed as knowledge, and taken as gospel truth. Social cultural theorists argue that individuals are socially, politically, economically, historically and institutionally constructed. This means that learning by an individual depends on how all the factors have constructed him/her (Olema 2005).

Indeed, many of the recent reviews of the impacts of this policy have been less explicit about the disparities and educational inequalities as expounded in the Statement of the Problem in Chapter 1. Considerable and further empirical research would be required before we can draw any sound conclusions nor understand the enormity of the regional poverty and educational inequalities. The theoretical approach adopted for this thesis will illuminate some of these contradictions. Chapter 3 provides the departure for this analysis with an account of the method, and methodological approaches, and will serve as the basis from which the thesis launches its critique.

3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of research is to destroy myths, illusions and false knowledge and empower people to act and transform society (Chilisa and Preece 2005:34).

3.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, several important issues about the way the study was conducted are described. These are: the planning of the study, sampling, data collection, data coding, data analysis and writing up of the results. The Chapter outlines the choice of techniques, methods and tools used to explore whether or not the 1997 UPE policy has eradicated regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda with evidence from the past decade of the implementation of UPE (1997-2007). The methodology chosen, matched the research questions, respected the limitations of time and resources, the ethical concerns, and took into account the characteristics of the participants who are invisible in the UPE discourse, as well as the cultural setting where the field work took place. The quantitative data, such as the administrative data generated for the SACMEQ II (2005) survey, the quantitative studies on UPE commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) statistical data, and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS 2002, 2005 and 2009) data, all suggest that the approaches adopted to assess the impacts of UPE are poorly suited to explain and understand the poor people's perceptions of poverty and educational inequality. Thus, even with some distinct drawbacks, qualitative research approaches provide a unique perspective into the local people's perceptions and feelings which, quantitative research cannot provide.

The focus of this study was therefore qualitative. This phrase - 'qualitative research' is conceptualised differently and different terms are used to refer to it. Bogdan and Biklen (1992:3) write that: '[f]ieldwork is one such term. It derives from the fact that data is collected in the field as opposed to laboratories or other research controlled sites'. Bogdan and Biklen (1992:3) note that, 'The term ethnographic is applied to the approach as well'. For this study I adopted 'critical ethnography' in conjunction with social constructionist and

emancipatory paradigms as an integrated approach. The questions underlying this methodological and theoretical analysis were: What role does the critical ethnography, social constructionist and emancipatory paradigms play with reference to the continuing poverty and educational inequalities? The theoretical framework and the epistemological stance that underpinned this qualitative research are detailed in the next section.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

In this inquiry, I positioned this problem within critical ethnography, social constructionist and emancipatory paradigms, in the pursuit of a comparative study of the three schools in three education settings (rural, peri-urban and urban) in the regions (North-East and Central) of the country in order to understand whether the 1997 UPE policy eliminated inequalities and disparities. Without aiming for exhaustiveness, I focused this study on inequality, using Kandel's approach, which states: 'the methodology of comparative education is determined by the purpose that the study is to fulfil' (in Zazamias 1961:90).

The purpose of this study was to address inequality in our society and schools. This integrated approach: critical ethnography, social constructionist and emancipatory paradigms, provided the theoretical framework. In this type of research, Creswell (2005) citing Thomas (1993), observes that the researcher is interested in advocacy for the emancipation of groups marginalised in society. Burr (1995) argues that the social constructionist approaches involves looking at the ways in which social phenomena are created, institutionalised, and made into tradition by human beings, while Creswell (2005) argues that the emancipatory paradigms, are best suited to address the questions of power, empowerment, inequality, inequity, dominance and hegemony. Table 3.1 displays the theoretical orientations, characteristics and implications of these theoretical approaches. This is followed by a discussion on how these approaches were used in this investigation into the relationship between the 1997 UPE policy and the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda (1997-2007).

Table 3.1. Theoretical orientations, characteristics and implications

Characteristic/ Assumptions	Critical ethnography	Social construction	Emancipatory paradigms
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inextricably linked to the social, economic, cultural and political structure of society. - Politically and ideologically minded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seeks to advance emancipatory ideals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A social process empowering people to critique and transform oppressive socio-cultural, political and economic structures.
Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborative and active participants. - Create a dialogue with the participants. - Challenge the status quo and why it is so. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seek authenticity and genuineness through the use of direct accounts of the researched. - Remain visible and self-declared in reporting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-learners and co-constructors of knowledge in a situation of mutual respect in order to respond to challenges collectively and individually.
Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experienced co-constructors of knowledge and central actors in the learning process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical, constructive co-participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fire to kindle. - Have the potential to transform themselves through awareness of domination and its modalities
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerned with the exposure of domination and inequality in society with a view to emancipating individuals and groups towards collective empowerment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dependent on context, time and frame of reference - No absolute truth exists only socially constructed realities. - Deepen understanding of the social structures that create and constrain meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge production is controlled by the ruling class. Knowledge produced perpetuates the domination of the other classes by the ruling class. - Should enable people to be critically aware and challenge the dominant oppressive power relations and structures in society.

Source: Kemmis *et al.*, (1983) and Janse van Rensburg (1995). In Babikwa, (2004:7-9) adapted and modified. Also includes adaptations from Cohen, (2000), Mertens, (1998) cited by Chilisa and Preece, (2005:33), and Creswell, (2005:441).

3.2.1 *Critical Ethnography*

These critical genres (or theory) focus upon the meaning of local events embedded in larger social, educational, economic and political structures (Pole and Morrison 2003). Chilisa and Preece (2005:33) observe that: '[c]ritical theory is used to explore oppressive ideologies, myths that support and reproduce the status quo and distortions and false appearances that stand in the way of change'. Anderson (1989:249) observes that: '[t]he overriding goal of critical ethnography is to free individuals from the sources of domination and repression'. The critical ethnographer collects multiple data that individuals are willing to provide, and develops these into themes that relate to the critical issue, while specifying changes that need to occur. Creswell (2005:44), citing Carspecken (1995), states that: 'Ethnography now incorporates a "critical" approach to include the emancipatory perspective'. This is an important element for the integrative approach. Carspecken (2001:4) observes that, 'Critical ethnographers generally research social sites, social processes ... in order to reveal social inequalities'. All such researchers, he argues basically begin their research with the assumption that contemporary societies have systematic inequalities complexly maintained and reproduced by culture.

Researchers who ascribe to critical ethnography argue that power, prestige, and authority marginalise certain people in society. Usually the critical ethnographic data is reflexive, showing how the researcher and those studied have changed. Creswell (2005:44) argues that:

Critical researchers position themselves in the text to be reflexive and self-aware of their role, and to be upfront in the written report. This means identifying biases and values, acknowledging views, and distinguishing among the textual representations by the author, the participants, and the reader.

Being reflexive is easier to define, but difficult to enact. Evidently, '[re]flexivity is neither easy nor straightforward' (Pole and Morrison 2003:103). It is often felt as a kind of activity of thinking backwards and forwards on an issue to illuminate problems and in the process solve them. This is the approach that the study attempts to follow. Carspecken (2001:4) however, cautions that: '[n]o

consensus exists on what a critical ethnography is, how it should be conducted, how its conclusions may be supported, how it is distinctive from other forms of qualitative social research'. Critical ethnographers he argues 'are opposed to inequality, which they conceptualise as a structural feature of society, and they wish to conduct research that will support efforts to reduce it'. Critical ethnographers take a non-neutral political stance and make explicit their aim to change the world. Such approaches are full of contradictions, imponderables and tensions (Denzin 1997 cited in Creswell 2005).

As a methodological approach, critical ethnography provides a theoretical framework to launch this study. However, as this investigation applied the integrated approach, in the next section, I provide the key elements of social construction, which is the second approach and my world view.

3.2.2 Social Construction

Socially constructed knowledge claims came from the ideas of Mannheim and works such Berger and Luckmann (1966) in the sociological account of constructed meaning, with their book, *The Social Construction of Reality* and Lincoln and Guba's *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985). More recent writers who have rearticulated this position are Lincoln and Guba (2000); Schwandt (2000); and Newman (2000); among others. All these individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live. Thus, the term social construction may mean different things to different people as its meanings are varied and multiple (Creswell 2003). In social constructionist thought, a social construction (social construct) is an idea which may appear to be natural and obvious to those who accept it, but in reality is an invention or artefact of a particular culture or society. The implication is that social constructs are in some sense human choices rather than, laws, resulting from divine will or nature. Hacking (1999:6), citing Haslanger (1999), observes that a primary use of 'social construction' has been for raising consciousness and it challenges the taken for granted knowledge by critiquing the status quo to raise consciousness about something. Hacking (1999) refined some of these ideas in his book, *The Social Construction of What?* The focus of the work of social constructionists is to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the creation of their perceived reality. For instance, Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that all knowledge, including the

most basic, taken-for-granted common sense knowledge of everyday reality, is derived from and maintained by social interactions. John Searle's work, *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995), provides a very basic and instructive account of how we can construct an objective social reality. Common sense knowledge negotiated by people, human typifications, significations and institutions then come to be presented as part of an objective reality. It is in this sense that it can be said that, reality is socially constructed. Burr (1995:3-5) identifies the following as the basic assumptions of the social constructionist position:

- A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge: challenges the conventional view that knowledge is based upon objective unbiased observations of the world;
- Historical and cultural specificity: all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative to any particular forms of knowledge;
- Knowledge is sustained by social process: it is through the daily interactions between people in the course of the social life that our version of knowledge becomes fabricated;
- Knowledge and social action go together: descriptions of the world sustain some of the patterns of social action and exclude others. Reality is socially constructed by interconnected patterns of communication behaviour.

The question arising then is how can we then justify the 'truth' from 'untruths'? Turnbull (2002:322) cites Gregen (1999): 'who proposed three types of discourse: structure, rhetoric, and process'. In this investigation, we will focus mostly on discourse as rhetoric which is a convention used to frame the world to achieve effects, and build 'favoured realities'. Any discourse could theoretically be used for good or bad ends, and there is no way of predicting the final outcome of the struggles in which discourses may be deployed. Despite their failings, social constructionist approaches direct our attention to the fact that researchers construct the phenomena they investigate. This approach questions the taken-for-granted knowledge, and therefore questions whether we can be justified in

saying that the poor vulnerable children, youths and adults, in the disadvantaged regions in Northern and North-eastern Uganda are really ‘marginalised/ disadvantaged’? Is ‘marginalised/ disadvantaged’ not just another discourse, just a way of looking at the world? Foster, Gomm and Hammersley (1996) succinctly state that: the fact that educational inequality is a social construction does not, however, imply that it does not exist.

Neuman (2000) cited in Creswell 2003) notes that researchers who have drawn from the works of Marx, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas and Freire believe that inquiry needs to contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of individuals, by addressing issues such as empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression and alienation. Social construction may therefore be integrated with the other theoretical perspectives to construct a picture of the issues being examined. Since this study is primarily for emancipatory value, we provide an outline of the emancipatory paradigm next.

3.2.3 Emancipatory Paradigms

Emancipatory paradigms are drawn from the groups of researchers who claim knowledge through an advocacy/participatory approach (Creswell 2003). This position arose during the 1980s and 1990s from individuals who felt that the post positivist assumptions did not fit marginalised individuals or groups or did not adequately address issues of social justice. Historically, emancipatory paradigms are influenced by various philosophies and theories with a common theme of emancipation and transforming communities through group action (Mertens, 1998 cited by Chilisa and Preece 2005). According to Chilisa and Preece (2005:33), emancipatory paradigms have been influenced by other traditions:

One of the influential theories is Marxism ... Karl Marx believed that those who controlled the means of production, that is the ruling class, also controlled the production of knowledge and ideas. Inevitably, the knowledge produced perpetuates the domination of other social classes by the ruling class.

The goal of emancipatory research is to: ‘encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researched at least as much as it is to generate

empirically grounded theoretical knowledge' (Lather 1991:60), with the ultimate goal to stimulate: 'a self-sustaining process of critical analysis and enlightened action' (Comstock 1982 cited by Lather 1991:64). Lather (1991:52) further argues that: '[e]mancipatory knowledge increases awareness of the contradictions, distorted or hidden everyday understandings and, in doing so, it directs attention to the possibilities of social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes'.

In view of the above, I therefore proposed the emancipatory paradigm to underpin this research for two broad reasons. First, this paradigm seeks to change the mal-distribution of power in ways that create a more equal world, and secondly, this paradigm critiques the status quo to build a more just society by giving voice to the less powerful. Lather (1991:61-62) corroborates this view, stating that:

By resonating with people's lived concerns, fears, and aspirations, emancipatory theory serves an energizing, catalytic role. It does this by increasing specificity at the contextual level in order to see how larger issues are embedded in the particulars of everyday life. The result is that the theory becomes an abstract expression and elaboration of progressive popular feelings rather than abstract frameworks imposed by intellectuals on the messy complexity of lived experience.

On the whole, a basic principle of emancipatory research is not only to challenge relationships typical of traditional research based on hierarchy and power, but also, to democratise the research process. The emancipatory approaches are suited to add voice to the less powerful to share their experiences, desires and needs through empowering approaches for generating knowledge. Thus, this emancipatory approach provides another theoretical framework on which to base this type of research.

3.2.4 Summary of the Theoretical Approach

There is no single paradigm that can be asserted with certainty because human experiences and predicaments are diverse and call for different approaches to

the perceived objects of knowledge, methods and research applications. In essence, these diverse and competing perspectives suggest that there is a multiplicity of interpretations in a field that is overcrowded. In which case it could also be recognised that the theories that have been advanced to understand UPE and poverty eradication in Uganda are tentative, dynamic and ever changing as more data is discovered. Needless to say, the dominant development theories of the past half century have had limited influence on the eradication of the poverty and educational inequalities due to their conceptual weaknesses, inadequacies and epistemological flaws. I have therefore proposed the critical ethnography, social constructionist and emancipatory paradigms to underpin this study.

3.3 Epistemological Stance

Griffiths (1998:35) argues that epistemology ‘encompasses a set of questions and issues about knowledge: what it is, how we get it, how we recognise it, how it relates to truth, how it is entangled in power’. It is a particularly difficult subject because, ‘how can we know what theory of knowledge is the right one?’ In view of these epistemological propositions, it is presumptuous to suggest that one’s research or knowledge is not open to challenge. Foster, Gomm and Hammersley (1996:35) write that to make such claims is to ‘misuse the concept of knowledge’.

Therefore, any knowledge generated from research needs to be supported and validated. Carspecken (2001:8) supports this proposition, arguing that: ‘[e]pistemologically, social researchers must defend the validity of their claims carried out by their research report’. This is done by acknowledging or defending claims to establish truth. This calls for taking a stand or position in research and supporting the knowledge of the findings. Carspecken (2001) argues that this position could be objective, subjective or inter-subjective. Critical researchers take a stand, usually subjective, and celebrate their political orientation. The position that I have adopted is clear. I have positioned this study within the critical ethnographic, social constructionist and emancipatory paradigms. It is widely understood that researchers who adopt critical approaches are concerned with social issues of power, empowerment, inequality, exploitation and

hegemony. They advocate for change to help transform society so that people are less oppressed and marginalised (Creswell 2005). They challenge the taken-for-granted knowledge in texts and they have a commitment to the emancipation of oppressed people. Chilisa and Preece (2005:34) reinforce this perspective and argue that: '[r]esearchers within the critical genres maintain that knowledge is true if it can unearth oppression and inequality and be turned into practice that empowers and transforms the lives of the people'.

It is epistemologically significant therefore, that, I have chosen non-powerful participants as is described in the preceding sections. The voices of these un-influential school drop-outs and local people in the villages are often muted in the policy debate. We are duty-bound, like all qualitative researchers, to reconstruct the validity of the claims made by these participants. However, pursuing critical approaches does not suggest that one is promoting political propaganda. On the contrary, and citing Chilisa and Preece (2005:34), I argue that: 'knowledge is constructed from the participants' frame of reference' and: 'Researchers who adopt the emancipatory paradigm view research as a moral and political activity that requires them to choose and commit themselves to a value position'. Moreover, the fact that the poverty and educational inequalities are socially constructed does not imply that they do not exist, nor that they are legitimate subjects of enquiry. My aim in this study is however to unearth the contradictions which are rife in these policy initiatives (UPE and PEAP) so as to empower local people.

In concluding this section I will point out that, the purpose of this research was to produce knowledge relevant to the public debate so as to gain a better understanding of the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda, and how this could be addressed meaningfully. The next section presents an account of how this study was designed and how far its goals were achieved.

3.4 Study Design

“Design” is used in research to refer to the researchers' plan of how to proceed' (Bogdan and Biklen 1992:58), how they proceed is based on theoretical assumptions and data collection traditions. In the previous section, I observed

that all research is guided by some theoretical orientation. Theoretically, this study combined the elements of critical ethnography, social constructionist, and emancipatory paradigms. Within this integrated approach, and the traditions of critical ethnography, the design identified cultural sharing themes through coding and a cultural sharing group (the PLE graduates). This integrated design encouraged the participation of non-powerful UPE graduates and ordinary people through the fieldwork, descriptions of the context and settings which are key characteristics that typically mark the critical ethnographic designs (Creswell 2005). I also adopted greater reflexivity (in representing the personal shaping of the findings, in light of my changing biases, and my involvement in the research), and narratives (for a more indirect, context-bound, personal form of theorization) identified by Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL 2007) guidelines for conducting ethnographic research.

3.4.1 Sampling Procedures and Sample Selection

The SACMEQ II survey report (2005) for Uganda observes that, the “best” sample design for a particular project is one that provides levels of sampling accuracy that are acceptable in terms of the main aims of the project, while simultaneously limiting cost, logistics, and procedural demands to manageable levels. In order to carry out this investigation, it was necessary to establish a sample design that suits the above considerations, taking into account the timeframe in the field for the doctoral study, as well as the limited resources for this project. The rationale for the selection of these locations, study sites and the participants will be given in more detail later in this section, where we provide a brief description of the social indicators, followed by an overview of the context in which these schools are located, as the basis for further elaboration. The detailed sampling procedures are discussed next.

Sampling Procedures

The study adopted the purposive sampling strategy for the schools and respondents, because rather than generalising, I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the insights from the UPE Primary leavers from all the education sites. Unlike in quantitative research, where the focus is on “random

sampling” and then generalising from this population: ‘[i]n purposive sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon’ (Creswell 2005:204). The strength of this strategy is that ‘it can lead to information that allows individuals to “learn” about the phenomenon, or an understanding that provides voice to individuals who may not be heard’. The sample selection strategy helped to capture the typical, regional geographic, and rural/urban poverty and education inequalities, namely: the rural or village school, the peri-urban or the Municipality school and the urban or the City school, which represent different locations and socio-economic profiles, and a mix between the peaceful and conflict prone districts and regions which exhibit diverse characteristics of poverty, remoteness, infrastructure and amenities.

A further typology to view the education system in Uganda is through a three-tiered structure. First are the elite schools which are at the top of the league of the best performing schools, concentrated mostly in the Central region, in Kampala city, and in Wakiso and Mukono districts. These locations have schools, whether UPE or private, administered by highly qualified managers and taught by highly motivated teachers, and often referred to as ‘effective’ schools. The private Primary schools are extremely expensive, affordable only by the middle-class families. The second category are the UPE schools in the peri-urban areas spread out all over the country in the rural districts, taught by fairly motivated teachers. Although subsidised by Government, these schools are of a lower standard in comparison to the schools in the city and in the Central and Western regions of Uganda. The third category of schools are Government aided rural village schools and the village community schools, which are characterised by weak administration, lack of facilities including, sometimes, the absence of adequate classrooms and toilets, de-motivated, poorly trained and paid teachers. The performance in these schools in the national PLE examinations highlights the disparities in learning outcomes and in the quality of education which is crucial for poverty elimination.

Sample Selection

The selection of the Primary school level and the Primary school graduates as the focus of this thesis was because of four main considerations. First, was the

original reason for declaring UPE in 1997. It was argued that this level of education was crucial for the elimination of illiteracy, poverty and disease (MoES 1999). Second, it was argued that the universalisation of Primary education would do away with a discriminatory and an elitist education as the basis for the transformation of society (GoU 1992). Third, the policy stated that UPE would eliminate the regional inequalities and disparities (MoES 1999a; Bategeka 2005). Lastly, the voices of Primary leavers are typically less heard in the UPE policy reform debates. The participation of this group of children, youths and young adults was intended to bring in new insights and foster partnerships among a small community of Primary leavers, *vis-à-vis* that of practitioners, policy-makers and scholars to build a common knowledge from which to tackle inequalities in learning outcomes between the three different regions and geographical locations studied. These three distinct educational settings provided a unique opportunity for a systematic impact study as well as for assessment of the best practices in the national education system (Darling-Hammond 2007; Heyneman, 2003 in Zuze 2008).

Sixteen Primary 7 leavers were selected purposively for cohorts between 1997-2003 and 2001-2007 in each of the three education sites in Kamuda, Soroti and Kampala. Access was negotiated with the school heads who were notified about the research between 1-2 weeks in advance. On arrival at the school at the appointed time, the researcher met with the school heads to verify the details of the schools and to identify the participants.

Rationale for Selection

I used the best performing students and best schools in each of the three locations as the criteria for selection for three reasons. *First*, the Government pursued policies to expand access, with emphasis on Primary education because it directly affects the rural poor (Syngellakis and Arudo 2006). Thus, the rationale for the selection of the best schools and students in the urban area was to use this as a test case for comparison with the best schools and students in the peri-urban and rural areas. The findings from this purposive sampling strategy would assess whether indeed this Government policy benefited the poor and the most disadvantaged most. One key indicator used in this thesis is to compare the learning outcomes in PLE at the end of Primary 7 between the best

pupils and schools in the rural areas *vis-à-vis* the best in the peri-urban and rural areas. The selection of three schools, one in each of these diverse locations for the 1997 cohorts who sat for PLE in 2003, provides a snapshot of whether the UPE policy is closing the inequalities in view of the evidence of the past decade.

Second, the selection of the ‘best’ performing schools and the ‘best’ performing students was based on the logic that students in the highly achieving schools stand a high chance for progression and future selection to post-primary, secondary and tertiary levels with prospects for enhanced earnings and occupational outcomes due to credentialism which characterises Uganda’s education sector. A UNICEF paper (2011:11) observes that: ‘A single year of primary school increases the wages people earn later in life by 5-15%. For each additional year of secondary school, an individual’s wages increase by 15-25%’. The type of school has a big influence on the grades attained, progression and on future earnings and occupational status.

Third, there is currently no way of assessing performance at the end of the seven years of Primary school for progression to post-primary opportunities except through examinations administered by UNEB, Uganda’s sole examination body established in 1983 to carry out this function. These examinations are uniform, regardless of the conditions under which learning occurs or the situation of schooling in these different locations. Irrespective of the quality of education offered, children have to eventually compete in national leaving examinations, at the end of the primary cycle, results of which are then used by examining bodies to determine progress to higher levels and as a gateway to a better life (Odada 2005). Odada observes that this is a misuse of examinations, however, it is the only modality currently in place.

The thesis acknowledges that this sample selection strategy may introduce threats that may influence the outcomes of the study. However, this was the most feasible strategy because of the logistics and procedural demands as stated earlier. It is worth noting that although purposive sampling was adopted for this study, it was not applied to the letter, especially in instances where I could not locate the Primary leavers, because they had moved away or were studying in schools in a different part of the country or had dropped out and moved to the city or towns and, as is evident, to the urban slums to join their relatives, and

most likely to become the urban poor. In their absence (purposively selected participants), I selected the Primary leaver who appeared next in the lists provided by the head teachers in order of performance to remain consistent with the sample strategy. The top performing females who were on the list were identified and interviewed.

Target Population

All the respondents and key participants were selected for the interviews on the basis of their connection to and/or their work in schools or involvement in the UPE policy. In each of the three sites, 16 Primary leavers in total who attended mainstream Government UPE schools were selected purposively for the cohorts between 1997-2003 and 2001-2007. This sample was for the pioneer UPE graduates and subsequent cohorts, who entered and completed Primary school between 1997-2003 and 2001-2007, thus covering a decade of implementation of the UPE policy. These UPE pioneers were aged between 13 and 14 when they sat for their Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) in 2003, (i.e. the 1997-2003 cohort), and are now aged 22/24, while the last cohort who completed Primary school in 2007 (i.e. 2001-2007 cohort), are aged between 13 and 14. The 34 adults sampled were identified by the nature of their role and position in relation to these UPE graduates. Fifty participants participated in this study.

This sample size is small in recognition of the limitations in the administrative and financial resources which were available for the data collection. Broadly, the typology provides the central framework for a comparative study, through the richness of the diverse perspectives of research participants who included: Primary leavers, head teachers, education officials, leaders and Education Executive Committee members. Others included parents, and civil society. The final sample figures are presented in Table 3.2 which summarises information on the number of education sites, regions, districts, schools and students. It also presents the gender disaggregated information of the participants in the sample. The rural areas offered a larger sample compared to the peri-urban and the urban areas. The characteristics of the participants are also outlined in Appendix VI.

Table 3.2. Participants for the interviews, focus groups and informal discussions

Education Site	UPE Graduates	Educ/Comm /Officials	Head teacher/ Teachers	Other	Total
Village UPE School	6	8	5	3	22
Municipality UPE School	7	7	1	5	20
City UPE School	3	3	1	1	8
	16(6F10M)	18 (1F17M)	7 (1F M6)	9 (3F 5M)	50

Source: Author's summary of the participants of the study

It is important to emphasise that these groups were fluid and discrete. They tended to be influenced by numerous political, social-cultural and economic factors which are apparent in the coding, interpretation and analysis discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Limitations

During the course of this study, I experienced some methodological, institutional and process limitations. These limitations did not adversely affect the overall findings of the investigation; nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge them for future reference.

The first limitation was the selection of the best school and best candidates for each school in the three locations. The logic offered for using the best performing schools in the three different locations has its advantages as outlined earlier, i.e. giving the best chance for each school. These three education settings were selected for comparative data because they have characteristics that were important for the study, i.e. their regional, geographic, rural/urban, ethnolinguistic and socio-economic divergences in the poverty and educational disparities. These schools and educational settings include the existence of effective and non-effective schools or the performing and under-performing schools, which are a good basis to explore whether or not the 1997 UPE policy has eliminated the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda with evidence from the past decade of implementation (1997-2007). However, the

selection of the best schools for each location also has its disadvantages as it is likely to mask educational inequalities within and between these levels. This could affect the outcome of the data.

Further, it is misleading to treat UPE schools in the different locations as equals. Although the best performing school in each of these three sites was selected for the comparative study, the evidence indicates that there is a clear-cut disparity between the best city UPE school, which is well equipped, and taught by better paid and motivated teachers, followed by the best performing Municipality UPE school and lastly the best performing rural UPE school. Generally, all schools in the three educational settings are treated on an equal basis under the UPE policy without regard for the differences in regional inequalities or the learning outcomes between the urban education settings and the poorer regions, municipalities and villages. High academic attainments are registered from the children attending schools in the urban areas and municipalities, especially in the affluent regions, while the reverse is the case in the poorer and less affluent areas. Moreover, the lower aspirations of the children living in the villages and the small towns are associated with the perception that post-Primary, Secondary, Tertiary or Higher education is less accessible to them (Syngellakis *et al.*, 2006).

There were also limitations with the sample selected as there are disparities between and within groups in the different regions. It is possible that children in the slums in the urban and peri-urban areas are disadvantaged. UNESCO (2010:11) notes that, '[s]lums are focal points for educational deprivation, partly because Governments fail to recognise the entitlements of slum dwellers to basic services'. The children in the slums in Kampala, such as Katanga or Makerere Kivulu, might not have the same educational or socio-economic advantages as the children in the affluent areas such as Nakasero or Kololo hills. These poor vulnerable children may not be able to access the same schools, such as those that were selected for this study. It is therefore not realistic to generalise that all children and schools in the city out-performed those in the peri-urban and rural areas. This comparative study may not be able to yield results that are generalisable for all disadvantaged children in schools in all regions in the country.

The small sample size is another limitation of this study. I highlighted this limitation briefly in Chapter 1, Section 1.10.2. It is useful to observe, that the number of Primary leavers selected to participate in the study in each selected school in the three locations is small and may not maximise validity of the within-school data collection for the Primary leavers. The selection of the best performing students and schools as the sampling criteria has some limitations. It is therefore difficult to generalise the findings of this study across the country from the too little information from few informants. A larger sample size, such as provided in the SACMEQ II (2005) study, would require larger administrative and financial costs. This thesis recognises these limitations in the administrative and financial resources available for data collection and conduct of this study.

I experienced the challenge of accessing senior level Ministry of Education and Sports officials. They were reluctant to be interviewed for this study. Those who accepted to participate objected to audio recordings of the interviews. Taking notes during the face-to-face interviews was time consuming in comparison to the audio recorded messages, moreover, it was not possible to capture all the information. This limitation was overcome by use of secondary sources, and published data available at the MoES such as the Annual, Statistical Reports and EMIS data, as well as the policy documents, which are readily accessible online or at the Ministry resources.

Equally problematic was locating the former Primary leavers in all the education settings. Although some had moved, had married, or their whereabouts were unknown, it was fairly easy to trace the Primary leavers in the rural areas, but it was impossible if not, cumbersome to locate the Primary leavers in the peri-urban and urban areas (using the selection criteria). Therefore, I interviewed those students who were living in the teacher's residences or near by the selected schools. In some cases, some of the Primary school leavers were suspicious as to why they had been selected. This required further negotiation and disclosure before obtaining and signing the informed consent forms. In spite of these challenges, this fieldwork gave opportunity to assess first hand some of the factors causing the regional inequalities between the three education settings and two regions selected for the study.

This section has given an overview of the procedures undertaken in order to conduct this study for this thesis. Reference was made to the sampling procedures, sample selection, rationale for selection as well as the significance and limitations. In the remainder of this section, and Chapter, I will provide the detailed explanations and procedures adopted.

3.4.2 Access and Entry to Research Sites

Chilisa and Preece (2005) observe that access and entry to the study site are important and sensitive issues that need to be addressed. Citing Denzin and Lincoln (1998), they argue that researchers have to establish trust, rapport and authentic communication patterns with the participants so that they capture the subtle differences and meanings in the participants perspectives. Similarly, ethics is an important issue that the researcher addresses throughout the study whenever they arise. In the next section of this discussion, I address the important issues of access, entry and ethics, experienced while conducting this study.

Approval and Access

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Education at Glasgow University, and after final meetings with supervisors, Professor Julia Preece and Professor Ian Menter, I travelled to Uganda for the fieldwork in June 2007. On arrival in Soroti, I paid the District Education Officer a courtesy call, and presented him with a copy of the Plain Language Statement (PLS) form (see Appendix I), which summarised the purpose of the field study on: *An Investigation into the Relationship Between the 1997 Universal Primary education (UPE) Policy and Regional Poverty and Educational Inequalities in Uganda (1997-2007)*; and the consent form (see Appendix II) to review, which he endorsed. I was able to obtain further approvals from the specific sites, from parents, and the schools after giving guarantees of confidentiality and respecting the sites. Consent was also granted by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), the top civil servant in the district.

A pilot study was conducted between July and August 2007 in Soroti town, with visits to two UPE schools in Kamuda. The pilot study provided an opportunity to

test the suitability of the field questions and data collection instruments. The data for the pilot included:

- Three formal audio-taped interviews that lasted from between 12 minutes and one and a half hours
- Five less formal interviews recorded in hand written notes
- Discussions with several key participants on the significance of the poverty and regional educational disparities
- A review of some documents, including household census surveys, Soroti district data, and NGO assessment data.

In consultation with the supervisors at the University of Glasgow through internet and the telephone exchange, the instruments were revised and then the fieldwork and data collection commenced. The field questions sought mainly qualitative data on UPE and poverty (see Appendices III and IV).

Entry to the Research Sites

Critical researchers use care in entering and leaving a research site. In this investigation, entering the education settings was multi-faceted, influenced by an integrated theoretical approach adopted for this study. First, in order to identify the communities, the school sites and the UPE graduates to participate in this study, I obtained background information to identify and select the best performing UPE school in each of the three distinct educational sites (in the village in Kamuda Sub-County, in Soroti Municipality and Kampala City). This information was obtained from various sources, such as the Ministry of Education and Sports Education Sector Annual Reviews (published since 2004), the District status reports, and secondary data from documentary sources e.g. Government UBOS and UNHS data.

The next step was to contact the head teacher in each of the three selected schools, inviting them to participate. When they consented, I purposively identified and selected UPE graduates to interview from the PLE performance

records. The criterion for sampling was based on the premise that it is good performance at the end of the 7-year Primary school cycle that enables candidates to progress or gain admission to the next stage of the formal education ladder. It is this understanding, which is therefore predictive of the increased chances of future success and employment in the modern private or public sectors. UNICEF (2011:1) observes that, 'Education plays a key role in determining the course of one's adult life - a higher level of education means higher earnings, better health, and a longer life'. Briefly, the following information provides an explanation about how data were collected from each site starting with the selected school in Kamuda Sub-County.

Kamuda Sub-County (Rural)

After the pilot study in Soroti Municipality, I visited Kamuda Sub-County to formally negotiate access. The Local Council Chair, granted access and organised a meeting with the Sub-County-Executive Education Committee. The focus group with these community leaders provided valuable insights about education in Kamuda Sub-County. They reiterated the feeling of frustration, powerlessness and a sense of neglect by the central Government, reinforcing the multidimensionality of poverty in being discriminated against because of the much broader political and economic developments in the country along ethnic lines, due, to regionalism (Allen 2006; Mukwaya *et al.*, 2008) as will be elaborated in the subject Chapters 5 and 6.

Chilisa and Preece (2005) argue that the relationship between the researcher and the researched in the emancipatory paradigms is not based on power hierarchy, but it involves the transformation and emancipation of both the participant and the researcher. Therefore, from the onset, entry was low key, and progressed in that manner to reduce any latent power hierarchies so as to get authentic data. Having identified the participating Grade IV village UPE School, through a rigorous selection criterion based on the best performing school in the Sub-county, I organised a meeting with the head teacher. On visiting the school, the head teacher provided a list of all Primary leavers who sat for PLE in the past decade (1997-2007). I then embarked on tracing them in the company of a local guide.

There were some simple basics that we took into account to produce an authentic critical ethnography and a social constructionist account of the fieldwork. It was necessary to greet everybody, preferably shake hands. If in a new area, we had to introduce ourselves. There was no need to be upfront about anything. We started with general conversations about daily events and routines and asking questions about issues related to the participant's experiences. In most cases the UPE graduates were interested to know why we had chosen them, or how we got to know about them. I would then go through the selection procedures, explaining the sampling strategy, and how we identified them (essentially based on their good performance in the PLE results which offer a good basis for a comparative study), and why we thought they were an important group to participate in the study.

In some cases, there were suspicions. For instance, one UPE graduate in the village was anxious about why she had been chosen for the study, since it coincided with a time when senior Government officials were threatening to arrest 'errant' parents whose children drop out of UPE.³ This participant had married, instead of continuing with secondary education, even though she was one of the best performing PLE students in her school, because her family could not afford the costs for progressing with the universal secondary school. She was inclined to be suspicious in case we were Government spies. After explaining the purpose of the study, her suspicions were laid to rest. With this confidence and assurance, we were then able to conduct the interview the next day. Her husband, also a UPE drop-out, joined in the interview.

To establish rapport, we started by talking about relatively unthreatening issues, and less difficult questions first. Once the rapport was established, we then started getting useful information, while moving at their pace. It was important to remain down-to-earth in order to blend in.

The Municipality (Peri-Urban Area)

Identifying Primary leavers from the Grade II School in Soroti Municipality for this study was not straight forward. The very nature of large peri-urban areas made it difficult to trace these UPE graduates in their homes, and/or schools unlike in the village. Therefore, after obtaining access from the head teacher,

and based on the approval from the district office, we identified UPE graduates living within the teachers' quarters in the school site. The selected participants were either siblings, relatives of teachers who resided within the school premises, or students who lived nearby the selected school. Other UPE graduates who participated were in the school at the time of the interview (playing football, or doing private study in the selected school). The negotiations were not extended, in the peri-urban and urban areas. Those who were interested were quick to accept, and those who declined were not obliged to participate. In short, I did not follow the more elaborate process of tracing these UPE graduates in their homes, as was the case in the village, due to the complexity and time constraints involved in tracking people in a large peri-urban area where the contexts and people are more individualistic than communitarian.

The City (Urban Area)

The city UPE School in Kampala is a Grade I and highly prestigious school, many serving elite in the city and many professional Ugandans in the diaspora have attended the school.⁴ The researchers association with the school spans about three decades, as a former student, which facilitated easy access. Also, knowledge of the serving head teacher may have calmed any nerves and facilitated authentic communication. The account of this school is the result of a painstaking comparative study of documents and interviews with those who participated in this investigation - to investigate why such high-status UPE schools out-compete those in villages, and the peri-urban and rural districts in Uganda, yet the dominant social construction is that UPE benefited girls and the poorest most (Deininger 2003). The narratives contain not only the voice of the participants from the education sites (rural, peri-urban and urban) but also my voice, experiences and background - through association with this UPE school on the one hand and a deep commitment to the research settings in the peri-urban and rural schools selected for this study on the other. I chose these cultural sharing groups purposively to examine these contradictions and the stark division between the relatively developed schools in the South (Central and Western region) and the underdeveloped schools in the Northern-Eastern region, a matter which has raised concern over the development patterns of the peripheral areas (Mukwaya *et al.*, 2008).

Summary of the Entry to the Education Sites

After entering the research sites, tracking and identifying the research participants, and gaining informed consent, the next step was the 'mechanics' of interviewing. I went through the Plain Language Statement form with the participants and clarified points where they had difficulty understanding. This gave them an opportunity to ask questions during or after the explanation. If they were satisfied, and interested, I asked them to sign the consent form. Then we proceeded with the interviews which were recorded on audio tape. If they objected to audio recording, then I took hand-written notes. For example, even when assured of confidentiality, a senior Government official declined a recorded audio interview because she did not want to be quoted - for fear of being victimised in case the research findings unearthed issues the Government may find controversial. The school was therefore a good start to identify, select and then to track the UPE graduates in their communities, selected purposively, and the adult participants in all the three sites. We have kept the names of these schools and participants anonymous as part of the confidentiality agreed to at the onset of the study, so that participants are protected from the pleasant or unpleasant effects of this type of research.

3.4.3 Analytical Methods and Data Collected

The field data collection took place between June 2007 and May 2008 in Uganda. The data was collected through drawing on a combination of strategies and analytical methods, namely, focus groups or participatory techniques; interviews of key informants; and documentary evidence. The first set of data consisted of data recorded using interview protocols, transcribed audio recordings from a database composed of words, and text (word) data of documents and field notes. The data was collected ethically from a small number of individuals from three distinct research sites using a variety of methods and techniques. The second set of data used consisted of the results of the data generated by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) II 2005. The third set of data was from the Annual Education Statistical Abstract by the Ministry of Education and Sports for 2007 and 2008. These abstracts are based on the annual reports by school heads and district

education offices, and contain some indicators on inequity including gender and regional differences. The other set of data were derived from the Education and Sports Sector Annual Performance Reports prepared by MoES since 2004.

The following key data was generated within the strategies outlined above:

- Eight face-to-face audio-recorded formal interviews that lasted from 30 minutes, and one and a half hours;
- Eight audio-recorded focus group formal interviews that lasted from 45 minutes to two hours;
- Fourteen less formal interviews recorded in hand-written notes;
- A record and text (word) of discussions with key participants who explained the significance of the poverty and regional educational disparities;
- 140 pages of field notes and field journal entries;
- Twelve files of electronic daily/monthly electronic journal notes, including reflective texts;
- A review of key documents (such as household census surveys, Soroti district data, and NGO assessment data);
- SACMEQ II 2005 Data from reports, journal articles and theses;
- Six MoES, ESSAPR Reports covering 2004/5 to 2009/10;
- Administrative data and Education Abstracts generated annually by MoES.

The field questions were pilot tested prior to the actual collection of data in the field. The field questions dealt with specific issues of inequality, poverty and UPE, and the trends, issues and concerns surrounding the disparities in Uganda. Smith and Glass (1987) cited in Wiersma and Jurs (2005:205) observe that 'a data record of 1,000 pages and more is not unusual'. While in the field, data was

routinely collected, properly marked, and kept in safe storage and only accessible to the researcher. I carried these back to Glasgow for transcribing, coding, interpretation and analysis. As a starting point, the data was organised into descriptive texts and formats that was easy to work with. This provided an overall picture of the complete set of data which became the foundation for the findings discussed in Chapters 4 and for the different themes that emerged in Chapter 5. The diverse methods provided valuable sources of information, for a basis of triangulation (checking the facts in other ways).

The specific methods used in the data collection were: focus groups, critical ethnographic interviews, documentary evidence for textual analysis and audiovisual methods and photographs on a small scale. They are discussed in the next section.

Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interview was one of the key methods or techniques and procedures adopted for collection of data in the field. Focus groups are a form of a participatory approach that, 'enable participants to create inclusive accounts using their own words and frameworks of understanding' (UNICEF and UNESCO 2010:67). Ethnographers use focus groups to explore specific sets of issues in educational settings. Proponents of the methods such as Kitzinger (cited by Pole and Morrison, 2003:116) argue that focus groups are useful in examining, 'how knowledge, and more importantly, ideas, both develop, and operate within a given cultural context'. The following are some key observations from the focus groups.

The focus groups allowed me to interact directly with the key informants, whom I had not known but with whom I developed a sustained relationship through the fieldwork. 'Participation evolved as informants were gradually able to build upon one another's comments through proactive and reactive verbal and non-verbal interaction' (Pole and Morrison 2003:41). The study also went through this process, as the participants realised that the field questions resonated with their aspirations, frustrations, feelings and the challenges they experience on a day-to-day basis in their real life. Pole and Morrison (2003) citing Stewart and Shamdasani (1990), and O'Kane (2000:41), write that: '...young people appeared

to like this form of engagement. This supports other accounts of focus groups as appropriate for research with children and young people'. This was particularly useful for the study because, focus groups were complemented with the more interactive face-to-face interviews. These participatory techniques enabled the breakdown of the power balance between the researcher and the research participants. It created space where these Primary leavers and the researcher were able to engage and speak without fear.

During the fieldwork, the focus group brought together opinion leaders in Kamuda Sub-County, and the selected village. There were between 2 and 5 participants per focus group guided by ten questions (Available in Appendix IV). I met with some of the interviewees after the focus groups for clarification and additional information or discussions. I made a record of each focus group interview, an audio-tape of the discussion and written notes. I acted as both the 'interviewer' and 'recorder' and later the transcriber and translator in the local language. Focus groups have both strengths and weaknesses. For example, because most focus groups were conducted outdoors, there was interference from the wind, from passers-by, curious onlookers and children. The transcriptions of some audio-recorded interviews were frustrating for these reasons. Using a private and quiet space would have been more problematic due to ethical and cultural sensitivities. In addition, 'Focus Groups present a potential challenge because they are not natural discussion groups and often group together people who wouldn't normally discuss or disclose information' (UNICEF and UNESCO 2010:67). The advantages of the focus group interviews, however, outweighed the weaknesses. The focus groups were used in combination with interviews and document analysis. I discuss the face-to-face interviews next.

Face-to-Face Interviews

Interviews, both formal and informal (or structured and semi-structured) were a key element of data collection during the critical ethnographic and social constructionist study. Prior to embarking on the one-year fieldwork, I developed an interview guide with ten field questions (see Appendix IV) to gather in-depth information from Primary school leavers who represent the pioneer beneficiaries of the UPE policy, of the 1997-2003 through to the 2001-2007 cohorts covering a

decade of UPE implementation. Government officials and local people in three locations and school sites in two districts in the country were also interviewed by virtue of the nature of their relation to the UPE graduates and the UPE policy implementation.

Lather (1991:68) argues that interviews ‘conducted in an interactive, dialogic manner that require self-disclosure on the part of the researcher encourage reciprocity’. This approach to interviewing can generate credible data. I encouraged reciprocity during the formal interviews - which were recorded with an audio tape-recorder and later transcribed and coded for analysis. Semi-structured interviews were hand recorded in my field journal. The ten interview questions were flexible and allowed the interviewee to probe deeper into new lines of analysis and to cover other emerging aspects not anticipated by the researcher. The field questions were pilot tested and modified in consultation with the supervisors. The interviews allowed both the participants and the interviewer to diverge from the main questions, but still gave a framework for the direction of the dialogue. Due to the nature of this critical ethnographic and social constructionist study, some of these questions were asked over a series of meetings, over time, with some of the interviewees - to negotiate meaning and understanding.

Interviews were very productive as a form of data. In the villages, the participants were emphatic about certain issues, and deliberately emphasised them and asked me to highlight them in the report. On the other hand, a senior education official in the city was so afraid of an audio-recorded interview, she instead preferred that I take hand-written notes of the interview. The findings and the emerging themes are discussed in Chapter 4 and 5 respectively.

Documentary Evidence

Johnson (1984:23) cited by Bell (2005) argues that:

the lack of access to research subjects may be frustrating, but documentary analysis of files and records can prove to be an extremely valuable alternative source of data.

The readily available data are those that have been out in the public domain, either through the documentary evidence distributed to schools, teacher colleges and other educational institutions or were available for sale in bookshops. As such, this method was particularly useful especially as access to some subjects, such as high level politicians, technocrats and other stakeholders who have been involved or have heavily influenced the UPE policy reforms, were difficult or impossible to reach during the field study.

An important source of documentary evidence was the SACMEQ II data generated, for use by decision-makers to plan the quality of education for ‘[i]mproving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy, and life skills’ (UNESCO 2000:17 cited in SACMEQ II 2005:152). Table 3.3 presents the final sampling figures for Uganda.

Table 3.3 The planned sample, achieved sample and response rates of schools and pupils for Uganda

Region	Planned		Achieved		Percent Response rate	
	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils
Central	45	900	44	695	98	77
Eastern	45	900	45	744	100	83
Northern	31	620	31	509	100	82
South Western	19	380	19	312	100	82
Western	24	480	24	382	100	80
Uganda	164	3280	163	2642	99	81

Source: SACMEQ II (2005:38).

SACMEQ II data collection was routinely updated by education offices for their administrative purposes (Zuze 2008). The entire sample of SACMEQ II 2000-2002 was from fourteen Reports from the participating Ministries of Education, with a total of 41,686 pupils, about 5,300 teachers, and 2,300 Primary schools in the Southern and Eastern Africa Sub-region. The planned sample from Uganda was

for 164 schools and 3,280 students, but the final sample included 163 schools and 2,642 students across the five regions: North, East, Central, South-West and Western Uganda. The response rate for pupils was 81 per cent, owing mainly to pupil absenteeism on the days of testing.

The Ministry of Education and Sports Education and Sports Sector Policy Review (ESSAPR) reports, published since 2004, provided useful documentary sources. MoES also developed the Education Sector Improvement Plan (ESIP) and Education Sector Strategy Plans (ESSR), in three editions to address the challenges and future developments, objectives and sub-objectives as well as strategies. These documents point out the strategic shifts of the Ministry of Education and Sports since the launching of the UPE policy in 1997. These were complemented by the Education Statistics Abstracts produced by the MOES education management information systems (EMIS) data.

The *media* sources also provided a valuable source for information on UPE. With regard to the media, Stasavage (2005:63) observes that:

Even a brief survey of articles published in the last few years by major daily newspapers such as *The Daily Monitor*, and *The New Vision*, shows that articles about the implementation of UPE continue to appear with high frequency.

With regard to the internet and online documents, Pole and Morrison (2003) write that the impact of the internet as a source of ethnographic data should not be ruled out. With the rapid growth of the World Wide Web, it has become apparent and acknowledged that the internet is an important source of data. The internet was particularly important because the study was conducted in two locations: in Scotland and in Uganda. One of the challenges encountered while in Uganda was accessing senior officials and data from the Ministry of Education and Sports and UNEB. However, since the Ministry has posted official documents on their Ministry website, I was able to retrieve these electronic reports and other documents for critical analysis, without any bureaucratic hurdles. Likewise, the internet contains electronic journals on education and poverty issues. The search engines provided leads to data by displaying sites which were further refined for further information. Some of the key documents included:

Uganda National Household Survey 2005/2006 (UNHS 2005/2006); Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2002 and 2005; The Poverty Eradication Action Plan for 1997, 2000 and 2004; Ministry of Education and Sports documents on the 1997 UPE policy; and Selected documents, journal articles and generalised reports on poverty and education since 1980. The table following, shows the techniques used for gathering data.

Table 3.4. Summary of the techniques used for gathering data

	Main features	Advantages	Limitations	Appropriate for the study of UPE, NFE and poverty
Face-to-face interviews	One person at a time	Provided in-depth data and unanticipated issues	The researcher played a dominant role in formation of field questions	Provided insights and in-depth information
Focus groups	Involved discussions between 2-5 people	Information checked for accuracy. A wide range of issues were covered over a short time. Groups provided confidence and collegiality amongst the participants.	Was not appropriate for discussing sensitive and confidential issues. Was occasionally dominated by a few individuals.	Was useful for the community interviews and informal focus group interviews
Documentary evidence	Consisted of my field journal, official documents, news paper cuttings and reports. SACMEQ II 2005 Education Abstract 2007	Was less time-consuming and inexpensive. It was useful especially as access to high level politicians, technocrats who have influenced UPE policy were difficult or impossible to reach during the field study.	Some documents were not authentic	Provided evidence from constructing the realities
Audiovisuals	Information was collected through photographs	Provided evidence of the contrast between the three UPE schools	Pictures were blurred as quality photos can compromise confidentiality	Provided evidence for constructing reality

Adapted and modified from Chilisa and Preece (2005:160).

Photography was used in this thesis on a very small scale. The select photographs in Appendix VIII represent the contexts where the field work was conducted, providing a pictorial comparative analysis of the settings - in the village, municipality and the city schools. The photographs reflect the stark inequalities between the schools and support the descriptive texts.

In summary, the data-gathering techniques, borrowed from a typology of Chilisa and Preece (2005), are presented in Table 3.4 above. There are many ways of collecting data. However, I selected the above techniques after thorough consideration. Every technique adopted required careful planning and skill in implementing. These approaches were used simultaneously. In the next section, I discuss briefly how the data was analysed.

3.5A Comparative Approach to Education Inequality

Comparative educators often run into difficulties when they attempt to make certain comparisons in complex educational phenomena, especially when trying to establish certain general principles or factors. The use of the notion ‘regional disparities’ or ‘inequalities’ as a tool for interpretation is not without its flaws. In Chapter 1, Section 1.10.2, I emphasised that a comparative study based on certain traits is problematic because a diverse country does not readily lend itself to tidy divisions (Grinsburg 2006). Therefore, I acknowledge that there are bound to be limitations in this thesis, as it is not a straight forward task to examine the similarities and differences between regions, with a small sample selection from two regions, (North-East and Central) and three education settings, (rural, peri-urban and urban areas), using a small sample size of 50 participants. However, secondary data obtained from large data bases, provided both independent and dependent variables, from scores in numeracy and reading from the SACMEQ II data, and from the scores in PLE results for the cohorts of 1997-2003 and 2001-2007, covering a decade of implementation.

These secondary level national data sources, such as UNEB data, MoES Education Statistical Abstracts, and the school records, complemented the fieldwork, and provided the basis for a comparative analysis of disparities of the key education

variables generated from these sources relevant to the purpose of the research, and the research questions. Specifically, these data are used to compare students' academic achievement at the primary level and to predict the post primary opportunities for students in the schools in these diverse locations - so as to understand the extent to which this policy is making education equitable or is eliminating disparities and inequalities. I also used other indicators such as drop-out rates, teacher deployment, as well as the categories given in Table 4.14, in Chapter 4, to complement the quantitative data from SACMEQ II and other sources, which not only assess the academic achievement directly, but capture other factors, external, to school.

The data described in Table 3.5 provides four variables: location, ownership, school grade and region, which also formed part of the selection criteria for the study sites (rural, peri-urban, and urban), and the participants (UPE graduates) in the three education settings. It (Table 3.5) also provides a summary of the characteristics of schools across all regions and locations. This table also introduces a new variable, namely, the school Grade I, II, III, or IV categories provided by the Ministry of Education and Sports.

There are several valuable points related to comparative educational analyses which can arise from this Table 3.5. The first point is that, the location, ownership, grade and region where the school is located may have a bearing on the classroom environment which in turn can affect the teaching and learning process as well as the learning outcomes. This is because schools in Uganda are graded according to total enrolment and facilities. Grade I schools are likely to have better facilities while Grade IV Schools are expected to have fewer facilities and lower enrolment (Muwanika 2008). It would be unrealistic to assume that schools with poor infrastructure and a poor teaching-learning environment can outcompete the good quality, first world, schools with motivated staff and in close proximity of social amenities, which attract the good teachers.

These variables provide the point of departure for the comparative study, and Table 3.5 following provides these variables discussed.

Table 3.5. Background characteristics of the schools

Variable	cohorts -2000-2006	
	2000-2006(n=8,665)	2002-2008 (n=9,439)
Location		
Peri-Urban	9.3	8.9
Rural	81.3	84.8
Urban	9.4	6.2
Ownership		
Community	13.7	2.3
Government	82.1	93.4
Private	4.2	4.3
School grade		
Grade I	9.9	10.3
Grade II	18.5	19.0
Grade III	43.2	41.6
Grade IV	19.0	19.3
Ungraded	9.4	9.8
Region		
Central	21.9	24.1
East	26.1	25.9
North	18.4	18.0
West	33.6	32.0

Source: Muwanika (2008).

The purpose of this section is to set the tone, and the empirical grounding and the basis for the comparative study. There are several theoretical considerations that guided the selection of Kampala (urban), Soroti Municipality (peri-urban) and Kamuda (rural) for further analysis; in what is sometimes described as strategic comparisons (Kohn 1987 Cited in Zuze 2008). These three distinct sites manifest the latent inequalities which are a microcosm of the country context

with disparities, most conspicuous between the poor wider North (North and North-East) and the affluent South (West and Central), as well as the problems of the core-peripheral, rural-urban disparities, marginalisation and disadvantage (Mukwaya *et al.*, 2008; UNESCO 2010; UNICEF 2010). Therefore, when I employ the concept of 'regional inequalities', I have attempted to be very clear and rigorous about how to establish inequalities and how to explain the regional disparities. For example, this comparative analysis strives for clarity by assessing learning achievement of the Primary cohorts by examining the location of the school, ownership of the school, grade of the school and regions as indicated earlier. Where the school is located may have a bearing on the school environment which in turn affects teaching and learning and eventual grade scores at the end of the 7-year Primary cycle.

In summary, the assumption so far is that children and schools in the poor areas benefited most from the 1997 UPE policy. However, some literature opposes these assumptions. In view of the evidence of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, which suggest that comparative educators have become more pessimistic - some say more realistic - maintaining that inequality was difficult, indeed almost impossible to eradicate even if basic structures are changed (Kelly and Albatch 1986); this comparative approach to the education inequality in Uganda will thus guide this study to confirm or dispel the overall goal to understand whether or not the 1997 UPE policy has eliminated the regional education and poverty inequalities based on the analysis of the robust qualitative data collected.

3.6 Critical Qualitative Data Analysis

The methods of data analysis developed by critical ethnographers from Houston bear similarities and differences with those generally used in qualitative research. Carspecken (2001:21) argues that: '[c]ritical ethnographers are "critical" according to the theory developed at Houston, because of the epistemological principles and substantive concepts they are based upon and not because of values and purposes of the researcher'. These same principles make it possible to produce an analysis that is critical of the existing social structures, inequalities, injustices and cultural ideologies. This ties in rather well with the social constructionist approaches, where the analysis of the data is to unearth

truths and taken-for-granted information. Since this study is for emancipatory value this integrative approach to the data analysis suited the analysis rather well.

Typically, a hand analysis may be preferred where analysing a small database (e.g. 500 pages of transcripts and field notes) or when the researcher has time to commit to hand analysis - as it is a labour intensive activity to manually sort, organise and locate words in text. Rather than use the NVivo (www.qsrinternational.com) computer application for analysing the qualitative data as originally intended during the conceptualising stage of the study, I decided to analyse the data by hand, using a systematic and detailed approach (described in Chapters 4 and 5) because I could devote time to this exercise. Besides documents and field notes, the audio taped interviews and focus groups were transcribed, coded and interpreted and entered into the computer. In all cases, the data were double checked in order to ensure accuracy of the data entered. Transcribing was a time-consuming exercise that took two months to complete. I transcribed the tapes and translated the interviews which were held in the village from the local language, Kumam, into English. There was no need to translate interviews from the peri-urban and urban areas which were conducted in English.

The transcriptions of the interviews followed closely what Carspecken (2001) calls searching for the 'critical issue' in the texts. The next step was to immerse in the data to allow for the meaning and the perspectives of the participants to speak for themselves. Turnbull (2002:327) argues that: 'often researchers choose not to engage with other studies until their own coding and immersion in the data have been progressed substantially'. I pursued this approach with the aim of providing context and to carry out a more accurate interpretation of the qualitative data. More specifically, the data would provide the opportunity for the examination of the effects of the 1997 UPE policy on the elimination of the regional poverty and educational inequalities which forms an important part of this thesis, without pre-conceived influences from other data.

The outcome of the qualitative analysis was the identification of themes that emerged from the findings described in Chapter 4 and analysed in Chapter 5 and the remainder of this thesis. The five themes were not developed in a

mechanical fashion. The hand analysis required many stages: in the identification of texts (documentary evidence), transcription of the transcripts, coding, grouping similar codes about UPE and regional poverty and inequality, and finally making judgement of what emerged from the data in relation to the topic of this thesis and the problem statement. I then cross-checked the data to ensure that they made sense. The integrated theoretical approaches adopted allowed me to explore the perspectives and the hidden meaning of documents and texts, and to unearth the inaccurate data that has made its way into national discourses thereby entrenching disadvantage and marginalisation. Since this study has adopted the critical traditions, reflexivity was crucial. This is described next.

3.7 Reflexivity

An integral part of the fieldwork was 'reflexivity'. The concept of reflexivity points to the fact that knowledge production requires participation in the collection of data - participation which has effects, desirable and undesirable, on the people studied and on the researcher (Foster *et al.*, 1996). They argue that in this sense, reflexivity is not an optional feature of research, it is unavoidable. Chilisa and Preece (2005:168) state that: '[r]eflexivity in this context refers to the assessment of the influence of the researcher's background and ways of perceiving reality, perceptions, experiences, ideological biases and interests during the research'. I found reflexivity particularly useful for two reasons. First to reinforce the view held by Chilisa and Preece (2005:168) that: '[r]eflexivity is a strategy to help ensure that the over-involvement of the researcher is not a threat to the credibility of the study'. Second, it is a guide to writing the thesis. Delamont (2002:185) observes that: 'all potential authors of ethnographic monographs, theses and articles must recognise that their writing up is part of the same reflexive process that carried them from the planning stage through the fieldwork and analysis'.

I describe the essence of reflexivity in this chapter. As a way of summing up, in the course of carrying out this research, I learnt three major lessons with respect to the design of this study. First is the need for a prolonged stay at one

site; second is the philosophical understanding of research; and third are the expectations of researcher and the researched. These are presented as follows:

Lesson One: Need for Prolonged Stay at One Site

The credibility of any study can be threatened by errors which occur in the field when the research participants respond with what they think is the desired response. It is in this context that Chilisa and Preece (2005:166), citing Krefting (1991), state that: 'prolonged time in the field and engagement with participants is important in enhancing the credibility of a study'. The initial design for the field work was to spend equal time in each of the three distinct educational sites (rural, peri-urban and urban) during the one-year of the fieldwork. However, in the course of the data collection, it became clear that compartmentalising time in symmetrical blocks was not plausible because collecting ethnographic data was not a straightforward mechanical process of seeking approval, obtaining access, tracing the participants, and conducting the study (using participatory approaches/focus groups, interviews and documentary evidence), and exiting the field. Instead, it was very important to negotiate and build relationships with gatekeepers and participants. Once trust was earned, then the data collection would proceed. Moreover, in order to submerge in the culture, it was important to get involved in the various activities including attending marriage ceremonies, funerals, clan meetings, helping to build the new church in the village (before the planned move from the grass thatched to the new structure) given my status as a guest of the village catechist and so on.

In a sense, these activities were a distraction. However, it was worthwhile, because it enabled me to submerge myself in the culture and proceed with the study in its natural context. It also enabled the research participants and hosts to go about their business uninterrupted. I was also able to develop a strong relationship with the culture sharing group, which would not have been possible by what Delamont (2002) refers to as 'brief encounters'. In this way it was possible for me to develop an in-depth and descriptive account of the culture sharing group, used for comparative evidence. Thus, the prolonged stay made it possible for me to generalise the data and findings from a vantage point. This leads to another lesson, the philosophical understandings which I discuss next.

Lesson Two: Philosophical Understanding of Research

Philosophical ideas must be combined with broad approaches to research (strategies) and implemented with specific procedures (methods) (Creswell, 2003). The integrative paradigms using: critical ethnography, social constructionist and emancipatory paradigms to underpin this study enhanced credibility through theoretical triangulation. These three theoretical frameworks provided a practical grounding in some of the philosophical ideas behind this research, without necessarily getting into a philosophical treatise on data collection. An example of my submersion into the culture as an ethnographic strategy, in a sense necessitated philosophical reflection in this academic journey. My hosts may not have fully appreciated the intellectual rigours of this empirical investigation, as their understanding of fieldwork was about administering questionnaires, tests and forms (with the ultimate aim of publishing the responses in the research report). If I was doing none of these activities, they assumed I was available to help at the bookshop, or to attend to some family matters.

As described, my hosts had their own philosophical assumptions of what constitutes knowledge claims and procedures of data collection, analysis and writing (Creswell 2003). However, by sitting at the Bookshop, I inadvertently found it to be the most useful place to meet several teachers, head teachers and other key participants, educators and some senior officials from both the rural schools and the peri-urban municipality schools. The Bookshop was stocked with teaching and learning materials, syllabi, textbooks, and resources for use in the Primary Teacher College, and other educational institutions in the county with an outlet in Soroti. It became the focal point where participants from the village or Municipality would meet for follow up discussions, or if they needed to contact me concerning the research. I conducted the interviews and transcribed the audio recorded interviews at the Bookshop. Therefore my data collection was combined with a helping relationship, which at first looked like a distraction, but it enabled me to develop concrete roles during the fieldwork, and to engage with the participants and develop a better grasp of the issues and insider perspectives. Delamont (2002) discussed the advantages of such a helping role during ethnography or fieldwork in her book, *Fieldwork in Educational Settings: Methods, Pitfalls, and Perspectives*.

Lesson Three: Expectations of the Researcher and the Researched

Finally, the fieldwork involved more than philosophical assumptions. Chilisa and Preece (2007:168) rightly observe that: '[t]he researcher is the main data collection instrument'. In addition: '[t]he researcher also analyses, interprets and reports the findings. It is important, therefore, that the researcher's thoughts, feelings, frustrations, fears, concerns, problems and ideas are recorded throughout the study' (Preece 2007:168-169). In the process of collecting and recording the field data, I was confronted with some ethical challenges and ethical dilemmas. Two examples will suffice to explain the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

In my first formal meeting with the Education Executive Committee at the Sub-County, one councillor was ambivalent about his participation. The second instance was during the pilot study when a deputy head teacher asked me to support him to find a publisher for his book, and in turn, he would facilitate easy access to his school. In the former, although I had already negotiated access from his supervisor, the Local Council Chairperson at the Sub-County, it seems this was not sufficient. I learnt later that several organisations visit the communities to extract information, and there is a perception among village-folk that they do not get anything in return from these encounters. Such organisations sometimes provided refreshments, meals and/or allowances for the participation of the local people in their activities (workshops, seminars, studies etc). This participant wanted to find out if there was anything (material) to gain from their participation. In the latter case, the deputy head teacher of the pilot rural school assured me that he would provide unfettered access, and I in turn should help him to find a publisher and a donor to sponsor the induction workshops to introduce his new textbook in schools in the Teso region. In both cases, the participants wanted me to assist them in return for their support. To this end I realised that: access is not established once, it is an ongoing process; and disclosure can help the researcher to deal with any ambiguities or the high expectations that research may generate.

I also learnt to expect the unexpected while conducting fieldwork. I had envisaged the lack of electricity in the villages, and that I would rely heavily on hand-written field notes. However, I had not anticipated practical difficulties

such as the frequent power cuts while in Soroti town or Municipality, or the floods (of August-November 2007 and the storms of March-May 2008)⁵ that led to a total blackout in the municipality during the fieldwork. The impossibility of regularly accessing emails, computer process field notes or immediately transcribing interviews whenever I made a trip to the Municipality from the village slowed the progress in the data processing, and entry of the data into my computer. The strategy that I chose for data collection and writing this thesis took into account these constraints as well as the rigours of this empirical investigation such as this - without disrespecting the research participants, or hosts. In the next section, I describe the ethical considerations as these were crucial to deal with the various scenarios that emerged during the fieldwork.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the fieldwork (and the data analysis) I drew upon the ethical requirements that guided this study, namely: informed consent; and the protection of subjects from harm (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). A further concern identified by Bell (2005) is the ethics of confidentiality. Ethics have methodological implications. In all the situations in the field I drew on these ethical concerns, and reminded myself constantly of the need to ensure that I was within my ethical limits. The Faculty of Education of the University of Glasgow has robust ethical guidelines which were valuable and guaranteed that the ethical considerations in collecting data and in analysis of the findings were adhered to. These ethical considerations are explained below.

3.8.1 Informed Consent

Researchers must gain consent from a range of different gatekeepers: 'school staff and parents, all of whom may wish to contribute to childrens' responses' (UNICEF and UNESCO 2010:66). Prior to accessing research subjects or carrying out the research in the various locations in the village, the Municipality and the city, I gained informed consent from the gatekeepers. In Soroti Municipality, the first point of call was a visit to the district Administration office, and a call to the Chief Administration Officer, the Education Officer and the other officials at the district. After gaining consent from these officials and conducting the pilot

study, I embarked on the data collection. I assured the research participants that in my reporting I would manage the data in such a way that subjects were protected from harm, and guaranteed their confidentiality by using pseudonyms and making certain aspects of the descriptions less explicit. There are some participants who either did not agree to take part in the study or have their voices recorded. I respected their wishes, as informed consent should be freely given. I have included the Plain Language Statement (PLS) form, the consent form and draft interview protocol in Appendix I, II and III respectively which I shared with the participants prior to the interviews. Signing these forms was a scary experience for most of the participants at first, but once the interviews started, they became more relaxed and interested with some volunteering more information than was requested as they tried to be as helpful as they could.

3.8.2 Avoiding Harm

The protection of subjects from harm was another ethical concern identified for this study and one which I paid particular attention. (Critical) ethnography can have damaging consequences for the people studied as well as others. Bell (2004:268) argues that: '[t]hese may arise as a result of the actual process of doing the research and/or through publications of the findings'. In addition: 'being researched can sometimes create anxiety or worsen it, and where people are already in stressful situations, research may be judged to be unethical on these grounds alone'. This is because the critical ethnographic research involves intrusive inquiry into the feelings and perceptions of the participants. Reflecting on the data, ethnographic research produces rich text and can inadvertently reveal the identities or clues about the identities of the participants because of the nature of the detail. I have consciously applied self-censure so as not to reveal too much in order to avoid identifying the participants, and also attempted not to reveal too little for the data to lose its meaning.

3.8.3 Confidentiality

I guaranteed to maintain confidentiality so as not to cause any psychological harm, humiliation or embarrassment to the researched participants and communities. I respected the privacy of respondents and explained to them what would be done with the information they provided after the research was

completed. In the fieldwork in Uganda, all materials were locked up in my locker accessible only to the researcher, while in Glasgow, all data was locked up in a cabinet in the graduate students' study room. All notes were to be shredded and tapes destroyed after the research is completed, submitted and all verifications done as may be appropriate. I will not refer to any participant by name in this thesis or in any report, or journal article that may be published for purposes of confidentiality.

3.8.4 Guidelines for Education Research

Below are seven guidelines given by Bogdan and Biklen (2003 cited by Jurs and Wiersma 2005:452) for meeting the ethical requirements for conducting education research. These guidelines were developed for qualitative research but they were generally applicable to my fieldwork in Uganda: Avoid research sites where informants may feel coerced to participate in your research; Honour your informants' privacy; There is a difference in informants' time commitment to you when you do participant observation in public places, and when they do an interview with you; Unless otherwise agreed to, the subjects' identities should be protected so that the information you collect does not embarrass or in other ways harm them; Treat subjects with respect and seek their cooperation in the research; In negotiating permission to do a study, you should make it clear to those with whom you negotiate what the terms of the agreement are, and you should abide by that contract; and Tell the truth when you write up and report findings.

3.8.5 Ethical Approval from the University of Glasgow

The University of Glasgow, Faculty of Education, Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees, provides guidelines for education research. Prior to embarking on research, all students are required to apply to the Ethics Committee for ethical approval. I submitted: an ethical approval application form; a Plain Language Statement (PLS) form; and a sample consent letter form, which was shared with participants during the field work and which I have also included in Appendix II of this thesis. Permission was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education before I could travel to Uganda to begin the field data collection. These ethical procedures and requirements are not

exhaustive nor do they encompass every aspect of ethics. However they provided a good starting point for my enquiry. This thesis has ensured compliance with these guidelines for conducting and in writing the findings of this work.

3.9 Concluding Remarks

The focus of this Chapter was on the procedures adopted in the production of the data for the fieldwork. The discussion identified clear links between method and methodology, where methods are the tools used for data collection and the methodology is the general theoretical and philosophical underpinning of the research (Pole and Morrison 2003). I have explained the theoretical and methodological perspective, design, methods, sample selected, data collected and analysed. I acknowledged that there were some limitations in the way the schools and the participants were selected. However, due to the logistic and procedural demands, the methods adopted for this study were the most suitable to answer the research problem.

The qualitative research approach was ideal due to the sample size, and the nature of the problem investigated. Similarly, the participatory techniques employed for this study, borrowing from qualitative research, built on the local populations' describing their own reality while accessing 'free' UPE, with the overarching conclusion that cost was a reason for dropping out of school. Through purposive sampling, the interviews provided ordinary people with the opportunity to express their feeling and perceptions on UPE and poverty. The documentary evidence supplemented the information obtained from participatory techniques and interviews through the SACMEQ II (2005) data, the MoES Reports and the Education Abstracts for 2007 and 2008.

I had to step out of the familiar, and take a new perspective to the research setting, adopting what Agar (1981), cited by Pole and Morrison (2003), refers to as the role of the *professional stranger*. It is within this outlook that I adopted a more critical awareness of my presence and the impact on the people, and the environment. The visit by Professor Julia Preece to Uganda during the course of the fieldwork to provide hands-on support during the data collection helped to

steer the research in the correct direction. In particular, I needed clarification on the epistemological, ethical and political assumptions underpinning the critical ethnographic, social constructionist and emancipatory study and how these would impact on the generation of the data. Thus the critical feedback during and after the fieldwork from both supervisors in Glasgow and in Uganda and later (in Professor Preece's case) from Lesotho steered this inquiry in the right direction.

The integrated approach allowed this investigation to illuminate the social structures of society and the schools in the rural, peri-urban and the urban areas that are reproducing existing social relations and the inequalities that are currently structured in them. It was able to provide a deeper understanding to the central question of this investigation: whether the 1997 UPE policy has eradicated the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda with evidence from the past decade of UPE implementation (1997-2007). I used such typical means as notes or transcribed recordings of informal conversations and interviews as well as an e-journal, to record the beliefs and attitudes of some of the research participants. These reflexive notes were particularly valuable for analysis and interpretation of the findings which suggest that inequalities are difficult to eradicate, as evident from the persisting inequalities in spite of the Government's commitment to the eradication and inequity in Primary education.

In sum, this Chapter described the procedures undertaken to conduct this critical ethnography, social constructionist and emancipatory research. The coding, reporting and interpretation of the research findings are given in the next Chapter 4.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

When they [poor people] express, share and analyse what they know, experience, need and want, they bring to light dimensions which normal professionals tend to miss or misperceive (Chambers 2000:163).

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter, frames the findings from this study within the core objectives of the 1997 UPE policy to make education equitable in order to eliminate disparities and inequality, the Ministry of Education and Sports Vision and Mission, the key field questions (given in Appendix III), and the key research questions (given in Chapter 1, Section 1.9). I make particular reference to the data from the second wave of the survey of Primary schools undertaken by the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) II collected two years after the introduction of UPE. The purpose of using this data was, to validate the claims made in the findings from the year-long fieldwork in Uganda, specifically in regard to regional inequalities and their implications for the UPE policy and possible actions by the Ministry of Education and Sports.

In writing the account of the data gathered (in the interview transcripts, field notes, informal conversations and other official documents) from the participants (including 16 Primary leavers and 34 adults parents, teachers, policy makers) who were involved in this study, from the three distinct education settings, a system of coding had to be devised. Such a process of creating categories (or coding) according to Dey (1993) cited by Turnbull (2002:325) is a 'conceptual challenge'. It entailed describing and classifying, once the researcher has gained an overview of the data collected. The data were then analysed using five research questions as the basis for the coding, namely: the state of regional poverty and educational inequalities; Perception of UPE, NFE and poverty; Evidence whether or not UPE is helping poor people; Social construction of poor people; and Designing UPE, NFE and poverty initiatives to reduce inequalities.

These main codes best describe and categorise information at the different levels and incorporate a wide range of beliefs, values and attitudes. We grouped similar codes (as well as the redundant codes), with the objective of reducing the sub-codes into a smaller manageable number of 17 codes following the steps suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) on how to develop coding categories. The identification of these categories is related to the three core concepts in critical qualitative data analysis, namely: meaningful action, culture and social systems. The results of the SACMEQ II (2005) Report are also referred to, and presented in a series of tables with the related codes that are important to the qualitative data collected, using an integrated approach: critical ethnography, social constructionist and emancipatory paradigms, from which the research was conducted.

The five main codes described earlier are broken down further into sub-sections. The introduction and summary of this Chapter bring together all the findings from the year-long fieldwork and the SACMEQ II Study (2005) data, making the links between the sub-codes more explicit. The sections following provide the findings from the fieldwork.

4.2 State of Regional Poverty and Educational Inequalities

The regional poverty and education inequalities in Uganda are shaped by a wide range of factors, as a consequence of the dynamic relationship between the existing social relations and the inequalities structured and maintained in the school system. The significant findings for this research question include: persisting inequalities; hunger as a barrier to schooling; and the education level of the parents.

4.2.1 Inequalities Persisting

The findings in this study suggest that, whereas the underlying objective was to eliminate inequity and inequalities in the country between regions, the 1997 UPE policy may not have attained this goal, in the past decade of implementation (1997-2007). The *regional inequalities* are still most conspicuous between the affluent Southern (Central and Western) regions and the poor Northern (North

and North-eastern) regions of the country. In an informal interview, one key informant in the peri-urban Soroti Municipality said:

Firstly, the best schools are in the Central region. Their children have a good start. They start with the best Primary schools and proceed to the best secondary schools. This makes them to dominate the top Government spaces in university sponsorship, considering that the cut-off points are very high. Even those who enter university through private sponsorship are mostly from Central and Western regions because they have the potential to pay fees for private university education (Entrepreneur, Soroti Municipality).

The quantitative data of the poverty trends over the period prior to the launch of the 1997 UPE initiative indicated in Appendix VII compares the UNHS estimates of 1993/4 and the data of 2004/2005. These data all point and confirm a clear ranking of Uganda's four regions in terms of average levels of consumption and poverty, with Central region being the most advantaged, followed by Western, then Eastern and finally Northern. This was apparent in 1993/94 and again 2005/06, with the data indicating that the trends in the regional differences have been maintained (Appleton 2009).

In a face-to-face interview, the head teacher of the city school said the regional disparities are a matter of level of 'input':

there are some disparities, not because the system has allowed it, but maybe because of the level of input of the people who are managing education in the different regions ... We are following the same curriculum, and the same guidelines and I don't see why we should have had any differences (Face-to-face interview).

During the ESSAPR Conference of 2006, the EFAG paper praised the Ministry for the remarkable achievements under UPE, but observed that the Primary education agenda remained unfinished. It is acknowledged that, while access has improved in many parts of the country, net enrolment remains extremely low especially in the remote, insecure and conflict prone regions.

Kasirye (2009:18) notes that, ‘it is evident that urban schools are concentrated in specific sub-regions notably Central and South Western Uganda’. The SACMEQ II data confirm this observation, stating that parents in this region (Central) are relatively well-to-do and can afford to take their children to school (SACMEQ II, 2005). All statistics, since the launch of the UPE policy in 1997, indicate that, the schools in the Central Region are excelling in the terminal Primary Leaving Examinations in comparison to the UPE schools in the remote, rural and isolated regions; especially those which were affected by insurgency and conflict.

The field data also suggested that the disparities, in poverty and the UPE outcomes were due to regionalism. A Primary school graduate from the UPE school in Soroti Municipality said the Southern (Central and Western) regions are doing better than the Northern (North and North-East) regions because the president ‘is from Western, so he favours those other guys [from the Central and Western Uganda] more than these guys of Eastern and Northern’ (Focus group interview, Peter). He argued that: ‘most of the officials, who are in the Ministry of Education and Sports, are guys from Western and Central Region’ (Focus group interview, Peter).⁶ I sought to prove or disapprove these claims by examining the Ministry of Education and Sports Staff list posted on the Ministry’s website and extrapolated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Statistical representation of Ministry of Education staff list by region of origin

Region	Top/Senior Staff		Junior/clerks/drivers Staff		Total
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Central	17	46	125	52	142
East	4	11	44	17	48
North	4	11	23	10	27
West	12	32	46	21	68
Sub-total	37	100	238	100	275

Source: The MoES Staff list Online with analysis and calculations by the researcher.

Out of the 37 senior level, and Head of Department positions, the West and Central hold 29, while the East and North hold 8 altogether. A look at the junior officers, reveal similar regional inequities in their composition. Of the 238 officers employed by the Ministry of Education and Sports, the West and Central hold 171, while the East and North hold 67. Cast as a percentage, this indicates that the West and Central hold 78 per cent while the North and East hold 22 per cent of the positions. These disparities are a microcosm of the regional imbalance in the representation in government jobs across all sectors of the economy, attributed to regionalism and the subtle ethnic consideration in rewarding tribesmen, (cadres) and supporters. Van Ackner (2004:336), Allen (2006:28-31), cited in Higgins (2009:2) seem to support this analysis attributing this to 'a tradition of political mobilisation along ethnic and regional lines since independence'.

Naturally, President Museveni, a critic of the previous administrations, and often described as a revolutionary and pan-African visionary, in power for over two decades (since 1986), has dismissed these claims, arguing that the people from the West and Centre, are qualified for these jobs. Whether the Ugandan state is able to take adequate cognisance of this reality is doubtful. It is clear from the employment statistics that the people from the North and North-East are conspicuously underrepresented from the top government jobs. Forces of marginalisation are at work, and the implications for UPE are clear. The school system is perpetuating social and economic inequality, beginning from the formative years to the tertiary levels, and is then predictive of future occupational prospects and earnings, as a majority of those Ugandans in government employment today, are there most likely by their connections. The people in power, however, argue that selection into the public service, and other Government institutions or parastatals is based on merit and qualifications. It can be argued that the high, socio-economic status of the ruling class, with their ability to afford quality primary schooling and post primary and tertiary institutions for their children, is the way to recruitment into government, which is the biggest employer and distributor of public and private goods, thus, reinforcing a vicious cycle of exclusion between regions and the elite in the positions of power and those who have been locked out in the distribution of the national resources for the past over two decades.

Gender inequalities are another constant feature in Uganda's education system. Geographically, most of the disadvantaged districts are in regions that have experienced armed conflict and insecurity. The Ministry of Education and Sports declared that, '[g]ender parity in enrolment was achieved in 2005' (MoES 2007:37), and therefore gender disparities have been narrowed. However, the evidence from the Kamuda baseline assessment, carried out by World Vision (2006) in the remote peripheral villages in Soroti district in North-Eastern Uganda, found that girls in Kamuda drop out of school faster than boys (the girls begin dropping out of school in Primary four) and that by Primary seven, the gap between girls and boys widens.

The same World Vision (2006:56) baseline pointed out that *girls* opt-out or are even at times forced into early marriages. One parent was quoted in Kamuda parish as saying:

my daughter once suggested that since I am poor, even if she completes Primary, I would not be able to afford her Secondary education therefore it would be better to give her away in marriage so that the bride price can cater for her siblings.

The deputy head teacher of Soroti Municipality UPE School gave similar views:

you realise that according to our statistics, very many of them start at lower, Primary one up to Primary five ... but as they enter Primary six to Primary seven, you will always get fewer girls completing the Primary cycle (Face-to-face interview).

This made one parent in the village lament that: '[w]e have a disease called early marriage which must be tackled' (Field journal). The high attrition rates due to marriage are greatest in rural and regionally deprived districts. The head teacher of the city UPE School seemed to support this observation:

I think this one does not apply to a school like this one ... I cannot think of a child who has actually dropped out, because we haven't registered any. To find that a girl has left Primary four, and is married is a very rare occurrence in my school (Face-to-face interview).

He added that children in his school move to join other schools but do not drop out:

In fact what happens is that when we start with a number of children in primary one, you may find that almost 96 per cent of them complete the cycle in the school, but the other four percentage may transfer to boarding schools... especially as parents tend to move children when they are in primary 3 to primary 4, when these children are old enough ... [They are] transferred to a boarding school like Gayaza junior school or other private schools which are having boarding sections (Face-to-face interview).

Another concern, is the persistent inequalities between the *elite public and private schools*, owing to a decline in the quality of the UPE schools. In a focus group interview in the village, the local community leaders thought that UPE has been introduced to 'fool' the poor people.

What puzzles me is this - it seems UPE was given to deceive poor people. If you consider the rich, they do not send their children to these poor schools ... They send their children to fee paying schools, but we poor people, the fools, are given this thing (Focus group, Mary-EEC member).

In a focus group interview with Primary school leavers of a rural UPE school, they said: 'children from private schools score better grades than those of UPE schools because they use money' (Focus group, Isaac). Similarly, unlike the highly motivated teachers in private schools, teachers in UPE schools are uninterested in teaching. Dinnah, a UPE graduate observed that:

These Government teachers ... say, 'after all, my money will enter my account, even if I absent myself from school for one month, my salary will come and I simply just go to collect it (Focus group interview).

The high levels of teacher absenteeism have impacted negatively on teaching and learning, especially in the remote areas and village schools. Teachers in some of the UPE schools in the rural districts continue to collect salaries but

instruction does not occur. Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2, indicates the enormity of the problem of absenteeism standing at about 27 per cent for head teachers.

The *rural and urban disparities* are also a key feature of the growing inequalities in UPE. The fieldwork noted that the most glaring disparities are between the affluent middle class in the urban areas and the rural poor people as a growing concern. A Primary school leaver from a City School noted that:

The developed districts ... are given more attention and are going to have better performance but if you are comparing, say a school in the North, where people have been running up and down [because of insecurity and armed conflict] ... the Ministry is going to lower the pass mark for them to pass, so, if you are comparing their results with ours, they are not good ... (Face-to-face interview, Carol).

For that matter: 'when looking at UPE, Kampala is always going to be the best, then Wakiso, those are the districts that are always going to be on top' (Face-to-face interview, Carol).

4.2.2 Hunger as a Barrier to Schooling

Hunger was identified as a major cause of educational inequalities in the country. The SACMEQ II (2005:50) study observes that, 'the health and nutritional condition of pupils can affect their learning'. From Table 4.2, it can be observed that all pupils in Uganda had an average of 9.9 meals per week with the highest number being in the Southern regions (10.5) and the lowest number being in the Northern area (9.6) (SACMEQ II, 2005). This result indicates that, overall, the pupils of Primary 6 generally had access to meals regularly, and should be generally well-nourished. However, children from some regions fared better than others, if one uses the Meals Index as given.

Table 4.2. Means, percentages and sampling errors for the pupil age, sex and home-related characteristics

	Age (months)		Gender (female)		Books at home (number)		Possessions at home Max = 13 (index)		Meals (index)		Parent education	
	Mean	SE	Percent	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
Central	164.5	1.52	53.8	2.88	30.2	5.41	4.5	0.23	10.2	0.22	3.5	0.13
Eastern	171.7	1.49	41.0	2.95	29.6	4.35	3.4	0.14	9.8	0.19	3.1	0.09
Northern	176.8	2.74	34.9	2.32	21.5	4.24	2.6	0.19	9.6	0.25	3.0	0.10
South West	174.7	2.91	49.8	5.09	43.8	8.02	2.8	0.37	10.5	0.26	3.1	0.19
Western	172.8	3.00	41.4	5.67	38.9	9.26	3.2	0.33	9.8	0.33	3.1	0.17
Uganda	171.4	0.93	44.5	1.63	31.6	2.62	3.4	0.11	9.9	0.11	3.2	0.06

Source: SACMEQ II, 2005

One encounter during the fieldwork provided a succinct example of how poverty and hunger combine to prevent children from going to school. I met a woman with her two school-age sons, one was 6-years old and the other, was 8-years old, digging in a school garden within Soroti Municipality, hired by a teacher in the same school. I asked her why her sons were in the garden, while other children were in class, a few blocks away. She replied that:

These kids slept hungry. I got up this morning to come to the garden, and they followed me. They said they could not go to school on empty stomachs, they didn't have food last night (Field journal).

A policy framework is in place to address hunger; an indication of the Government's commitment to tackling barriers under UPE. The Ministry's policy in terms of school meals is clearly spelt out in the Education Act (2008). It states that provision of meals is the responsibility of parents. It is obvious that some parents cannot afford to feed their children due to many reasons, the most common being poverty. Likewise, UPE schools are not able to fulfil this urgent need of feeding hungry children. The deputy headmistress of the peri-urban school in Soroti Municipality observed that:

the Government says, we are supposed to feed children at school, now we ask where is the money supposed to come from? The Government tells us charge Uganda shillings UGHS 5,500/= for mid day meals; but look at the prices of food today, we still can't afford it. If they [pupils] can't pay we can't afford to buy school meals, so we say no, we are not feeding them (Face-to-face interview).

The premise that UPE is helping poor families most must be carefully scrutinised. Food is often limited among these poor families and hunger makes learning difficult. Lack of meals for these poor children leads to poor concentration in class, irregular attendance, and the high dropout rates witnessed among the disadvantaged, mostly from the poorest quintiles.

4.2.3 Parents' Education Level

A majority of parents in rural areas, have had a brief experience with formal schooling, if we go by the levels of literacy. The national statistics indicate that the illiteracy rate in the rural areas are higher than those in the urban areas, with glaring disparities between the wider North which is lagging behind the Southern regions. The Uganda National Household Survey 2002/2003, noted that the literacy rates in the country are as follows: the Central region - 80 per cent; Western region - 74 per cent; Eastern region - 63 per cent; and Northern region - 56 per cent.

Parents are considered literate, semi-literate or illiterate depending on their level of education. They are assessed in terms of whether or not they have 'papers' or academic credentials, i.e. certificates, diplomas, degrees etc. In a focus group with the PTA and the SMC leaders in the village, they said some of these illiterate people in the village claim to know a lot and so it is difficult to work with some of them:

In the village, there are very many uninformed people, who claim to know a lot, but the majority do not understand development, that is why it is difficult to do anything constructive there. If you try to lead, and to help, you will be regarded as the enemy. That is why one becomes afraid (Focus group, Elmi- EEC member).

The perception is that parents who do not have a good formal education, lack the ability to analyse issues intelligently, or, to positively influence the education of their children.

Similarly, the focus group interview with the village UPE Primary leavers suggested that poor children in the villages drop out of school because of their academic abilities:

some parents are not intelligent, and their children are born with those traits, they follow the same path as their parents ... a child goes to school, but starts escaping, to go home, and they say, '*after all my family is rich*'. But they are not actually rich (Focus group, Isaac).

These children join the ranks of those uneducated people in the villages and continue the vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty. A Primary leaver from the peri-urban Municipality school in Soroti suggested that parents in the villages must be forced to take their children to school: ‘the Government should just force people to be educated’ (Focus group, Petero). This assertion, made in good faith, paints a picture of the ‘village poor’ as people who are incapable of making intelligent choices about their lives or that of their children. This stigma follows illiterate people everywhere they go, as they are marginalised in all walks of life.

In another informal interview, a participant from Kaberamaido (a district, carved out of Soroti), said poor people are gullible:

Poor people are easily confused or manipulated ... [because] they have a low education. They cannot understand or interpret situations. Poor people are easily directed or mis-directed (Informal interview).

In an interview, the head teacher from the village UPE School, said that these local people in Soroti district lost their wealth to the Karamojong warriors in the cattle raids in the 1980s and the 1990s because they were unaware of how to protect their livestock against risks, for example, by diversifying their investments or undertaking less risky ventures:

When I reflect, our parents were rich with cows, but as I see it now, these parents were poor they did not have any beds ... their work was to sleep at the *kraal* in the open air to watch over their cows. I consider this poverty. If these elders were informed, they would have bought beds, they could have built permanent houses, with corrugated iron sheets. The Karamojong raided our cows, and took all their wealth, and then these elders died with nothing (Face-to-face interview).

Illiteracy goes hand-in-hand with the level of education of parents. Children of less literate parents are at a disadvantage and this phenomenon has regional implications which are also the thrust of this study. SACMEQ II noted an expectation that:’ parents with more education will provide a home atmosphere

that is more conducive to learning, than, parents with lower levels of education and will help their children in many ways with their learning' (2005:50). This finding is elaborated further in Section 4.6.5.

Summary of the State of Regional Poverty and Educational Inequalities

Persisting inequalities, hunger, and the level of the parents' education are some of the factors impacting on the universalisation of Primary education in the country. If we go deeper into the interpretations of these findings, we will agree with Waters (1998), that schools are inextricably linked to the communities they serve through social, political, economic, and cultural interests. The hierarchical relationships that transpire within schools are linked to the broader political and economic context. For example, the regions (in the wider North) that are under-performing in all poverty and educational indicators, are also the least represented in the 'corridors' of power within the Ministry of Education and Sports, in the other public service portfolios, and in the vibrant and growing private sector. These educational and poverty inequalities are therefore a reflection of the unequal political system that is transmitted in the social and political inequalities to all spheres of life.

4.3 Perception of UPE, NFE and Extreme Poverty

The data that emerged from the fieldwork indicates that the perception and meaning of UPE, NFE and poverty are diverse. These perceptions are largely dependent on cultural, political, social, economic and religious values of the different groups and categories of participants. In this section, we shall focus on the three sub-categories: The concept of ‘free’ UPE policy; the diverse perspectives of non-formal education; and extreme poverty.

4.3.1 The Concept of ‘Free’ UPE Policy

The field data revealed that the meaning of free education was distorted to disguise its real meaning and cost. Several circulars, that were issued in the years following the launch of UPE, created the assumption that the Government would shoulder all responsibility. In reality, parents were still required to contribute to the non-tuition costs of education for their children in the form of lunch fees, examination fees, extracurricular activities etc. A baseline assessment conducted by World Vision (2006) in Kamuda found that the concept of UPE was misunderstood by the local people. A focus group of the Education Executive Committee (EEC) members in Kamuda, said that:

People do not know the meaning of free education, because parents are still required to pay money, yet they [Government] keep saying it is free, what is free about it? (Focus group, John - EEC member).

If parents are requested to contribute money for school they say: ‘we have been told that children will study for free, and we are prohibited from paying money for anything, including for PTA’ (Focus group, Mary). School heads are faced with a dilemma; to levy a fee and keep schools running or not to levy any charge and be forced to close altogether. The reality is that the funds that are disbursed by the Central Government to schools for UPE is insufficient, consequently school heads are forced to levy informal charges to keep schools running.

The deputy head teacher of the peri-urban UPE School in Soroti Municipality said that parents get enraged when requested to contribute money to keep schools running because, in their mind, UPE should be totally ‘free’. She said:

we try to discuss with parents, we tell them, you know, it is not free; you are only misunderstanding, you are supposed to take part in minimal contributions to help your child have an effective learning situation (Face-to-face interview).

Without elaborating, the head teacher of the city UPE School said, they are left with no alternative but to look for 'creative' ways of getting additional money from parents:

you must really think and you must use your creativity to make sure that you mobilise resources ... that has been a little bit challenging and making you think and look beyond what is put into the school account by the Ministry (Face-to-face interview).

This finding, laid down clearly that, an understanding of UPE cannot be completed without understanding how this policy is funded. The Ministry of Education and Sports provides two types of grants for UPE, namely, the Capitation Grant (CG) (which is for fee payment) and School Facilities Grants (SFG) (which is paid for infrastructure improvement). These grants are paid on the basis of the number of students enrolled in a school and depending on the level, whether lower or upper primary. The third element, which is ambiguous, is the parents' contribution. It is illegal for parents to pay any fees under UPE, except those permissible by the Ministry (See Education Act 2008). However, the data indicates that parents' still make contributions to non-tuition costs. The evidence reveals that parents' contributions happened informally, due to a myriad of factors, key of which is the financial constraints experienced in UPE schools due to acute funding gaps- whether at the central and district level.

The head teacher of the village school for instance, stated that, the allocations for UPE by the Government are meagre. This is coupled with the delays in remitting this money into the school account. This, according to him is what has compelled schools to request parents to contribute modest sums of money to purchase scholastic materials, conduct examinations or provide for urgent needs that are unfunded by the Ministry:

Parents' are requested to contribute small sums of money, because the money allocated by Government is not enough ... that is how parents are helping... [the Government] money is not sufficient, it does not meet the costs for running the school completely and this money does not come on time (Interview, Head teacher, UPE rural village school).

The deputy headmistress of the municipal Primary school in Soroti said 'the Government tells us no child is supposed to be sent away and yet the [scholastic] materials that the Government actually sends, comes late and are not enough for those children' (Face-to-face interview). She added that:

The time came when we couldn't manage totally to run, so I think the Government realised it and we were permitted to charge 10,400 Uganda Shillings, [UK£1 = aprox. 3,650 UGX] ... but look at the locality of this particular school, most of our parents ... just resettled here as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) right from the first Karamojong insurgencies [of the 1980s] (Face-to-face interview).

The head teacher of the city UPE School had this to say about the limited funding for UPE:

If you look at the amount of money the Government releases per child in a Primary school, it is far far far below reality, because Uganda shillings 4,500 is the cost of nine bottles of soda! That is the amount of money the Government releases per child per term (under the Capitation Grant) (Face-to-face interview).

Decrying the meagre resources that the Government remits to schools under UPE he said:

we do not get sufficient facilitation, and as an administrator of an institution, as big as you can see my school is, you are put at a challenge to make sure the institution runs (Face-to-face interview).

In an informal discussion with a retired education official in the village, he said school inspection is almost impossible because the District Education Officers (DEOs) office lack the funding for this purpose:

The DEO's vehicle is broken down. The inspector of schools does not have fuel to carry out inspection. So there is no information about the schools. For example, the head teacher of the school I was assigned to [as an external invigilator for PLE in November 2007] was not present yesterday, yet PLE was being conducted in his school. (Informal conversation).

The IOB (2008:148) report identifies a similar challenge in their evaluation of Masindi district in Uganda. The report notes: 'The district does not have adequate transport to visit schools. Vehicles are old (10 years) and need replacement'. The Ministry of Education and Sports' ESSAPR Report notes at least, '60 per cent (9,013) of Primary schools were inspected at least once a term based on a follow up done in 35 districts' (MoES 2009:109). This suggests that not all schools were visited, and the frequency of visits was minimal.

The SACMEQ II Data presented in Table 4.3 provides a snapshot of the level of engagement and interaction of inspectors with UPE schools. The largest percentage of pupils (85.3 per cent) were in schools that had had a full inspection. About a third (67.9 per cent) of the pupils were in schools that were visited at least once by the concerned officials on routine inspection, and 60.7 per cent were visited to assist teachers. Results from the table also reveal that few inspectors (11.7 per cent) visited schools to inspect teachers for promotion or to address crises or problems. The data also suggest that inspectors were perceived to be coming to the school in order to assist teachers and advising the school head.

Table 4.3. Percentages and sampling errors for school inspections

Purpose of Inspection	Inspection took place in past 3 years	
	%	SE
Full inspection	85.3	3.30
Routine inspection	67.9	4.41
Inspect teachers - <u>not</u> for promotion	37.5	4.38
Inspect teachers - <u>for</u> promotion	11.7	2.63
Assist teachers	60.7	4.44
Advise the school head	55.6	4.58
Address crisis/problem	26.4	3.96
Courtesy call	53.0	4.58

Source: SACMEQ II (2005: 135).

It was also observed during the fieldwork that knowledge of English was equated to excellence. In the focus group in the villages, the Primary leavers said:

There are people who are very poor, they cannot get money to pay for their children [non-tuition costs] but at least, their children are educated, even if they stop at primary 7, they will understand some little English' (Focus group, Dinnah).

The other Primary school leavers shared the same views saying:

my parents can be proud. God willing let my child push on until Primary 7, or thereabouts. If I cannot get money to send him to Secondary school, there is no problem, as long as he understands a little English, or can write or read a letter (Focus group, Isaac).

In addition, they said:

UPE is helping children to learn English. At least, if a child has gone to school, even if they end in Primary 7, they will branch out and take some course that will make them end in an office. But if you just start from home, you do not know English, even one word, you do not even know how to greet, that '*good morning*' where will you start? (Focus group, Dinnah).

English is still enjoying the symbolic power afforded to it from the pre-democratic era (Bourdieu 1991). This perhaps explains the perception of English as the symbol of knowledge in Uganda. English is synonymous with education. English is almost equated with education itself. Parents think that 'real' education can only be obtained in a world language, such as, English. This view was also held by a Primary graduate from the peri-urban Municipality school. He said: 'UPE has helped people in the villages to learn English'; Moreover, in his view: 'UPE has enabled the Government to reduce illiteracy in Uganda, especially in the villages because, people have learned to speak English' (Focus group, Pius).

The city Primary school graduate held similar views. She said that the pupils they visited in a 'third world' Primary school, near her 'traditional' first world secondary school in Wakiso district located in Central Uganda, could not communicate with them because: '[t]hey cannot even speak English':

You enter a class and not even one pupil can speak an English word. So when you look at UPE, I think, it has mainly helped specific areas, now like here in Kampala, and in schools like Namagunga, Gayaza Junior (Face-to-face interview, Carol).

The SACMEQ II (2005) Survey noted the influence of English in the schools surveyed. This Report states that a large percentage of pupils comprising just over 80 per cent spoke English in their homes, at least sometimes. The largest percentage (90.6 per cent) of the Primary pupils who spoke English at home were Northerners. In contrast, the smallest percentage of Primary 6 pupils who spoke English were located in the Western Region (64.3 per cent).

Table 4.4. Percentages, mean, and sampling errors for the pupils speaking English language, days absent, and repetition

Region	Speak English		Days Absent		Repetition	
	%	SE	Mean	SE	%	SE
Central	85.0	4.04	1.9	0.14	43.6	3.21
Eastern	86.9	2.77	2.0	0.15	52.0	3.71
Northern	90.6	2.12	1.7	0.17	54.3	4.37
South Western	73.2	4.59	1.8	0.25	66.3	5.05
Western	64.3	9.92	2.1	0.16	55.3	3.24
Uganda	82.4	1.97	1.9	0.08	52.9	1.86

Source: SACMEQ II (2005:58).

The argument given by the authors of SACMEQ II (2005:58) is that:

The probable reason for the Northerners' reliance on the use of English language at home may have something to do with the continuing insecurity in that area. Since many of them live in camps and therefore have to use a language that is common to all of them, they frequently resort to the use of English.

This argument explains three things: First, is the instability and the decades of insecurity and conflict in Northern Uganda. Although peace has now returned, this region was described as the worst humanitarian crisis in the World in 2003. Second, is that, Uganda is an extremely ethnically diverse country, with an imaginary line drawn between the Bantu speakers in the South and the Nilotic North. Third, is the use of English as the common language for all. This last point is crucial in regard to the position of English vis a vis, Kiswahili, the national language, and the other Ugandan languages.

The Ministry of Education and Sports' selection and promotion of the ten major ethnic groups and dominant languages, through the introduction of the thematic curriculum, further complicates the linguistic landscape in Uganda. By 2008, the following ten languages had been approved by the NCDC as media of instruction

in primary education: Acholi; English; Ganda; Karamojong; Konjo; Lugbara; Nyankore/Chiga; Nyoro/Tooro; Soga, and Teso (Rosendal 2010:154). These are only 10 out of the country's 56 languages listed in the constitution. The Ministry of Education's Language policy circular No. 3/05 of 10th January 2005 (MoES, 2007) gave directives that, '[o]nly main area languages already approved by the MoES can be used as Language of Instruction (LOI) without specific approval from the MoES' (2007:5).

Power is about control over resources that are limited, in this case, allocation of funds to the ten dominant languages. Using Bourdieu's theory, Rosendal (2010) argues that this functional allocation of a language empowers its speakers. This approach to language policy implementation in an ethnically diverse country can only entrench the misconceived idea about the superiority of English and the ten dominant languages and cultures, over the minority languages and linguistic groups. Critics of the thematic curriculum have argued that this approach undermines equity and have advocated for the promotion of the national language, Kiswahili, a neutral language, which does not carry any ethnic tag, as the most equitable language to promote for inter-cultural communication. Promoting all 56 languages may not be feasible, but promoting one neutral and common single unifying language, rather than a few 'dominant' ethnolinguistic groups, can help the country attain the overall goals of the UPE policy to eliminate disparities and inequality in society.

4.3.2 The Diverse Perspectives of Non-Formal Education

The field data revealed the diverse and conflicting views about non-formal education (NFE). When I asked whether non-formal education was provided in their locality, whether it is provided as an alternative to UPE, whether it is competing or complementary to UPE and how NFE and UPE work in reality, the responses were varied. Table 4.5 summarises the responses.

Table 4.5. Selected participants' (Primary leavers, head teachers and community leaders) description of non-formal education

Participant/Respondent	Is NFE provided in your locality?
Focus group (EEC, John, Mary)	It's not there, only UPE exists.
Focus group (Joramh)	Maybe in other villages, but I have not seen it here
Focus group (Isaac)	Maybe coaching, but coaching is under the formal school system 'If it does exist, I will call that informal education, not even formal...
Focus group (Dinnah)	What about non-formal education. What is it? How can one access it?
	Meaning of NFE
Focus group (Ali).	... non-formal education is just taught at homes and UPE is taught at schools ... ; ... in UPE they deal with writing, they have notes, but in non-formal education it is just like advice
Focus group (Devina)	Non-formal education is the education given in the ancient times when elders used to sit (around fires) and teach them how to behave. This is the music, dance and drama, the traditional dances and folk songs
Face-to-face, interview (Brenda)	It is a type of education which was given by the family.
Face-to-face interview (HM, village school)	They say education is lifelong. That is NFE.
	Role of NFE and whether NFE is helping poor people
Focus group (Pius)	UPE is more important than non-formal education because UPE makes somebody respected in future; It is not all that in the side of education, it is on the side of money.
Focus group (Petero)	Guides and advises children on the day-to-day life...
Focus group (Isaiah)	NFE is like weeding and [and] slashing the compound.
Face-to-face interview (HM, City School)	For me I look at non-formal education as the education that helps the child to fit in the community.
Face-to-face interview (Senior MoES Official)	This program was meant for houseboys and house girls, 'Buvera sellers' ⁸ who do not have time to study. It is a compact school curriculum in three years. They are meant for those failing to get time for the whole day.

Source: Interviews, focus groups and informal discussions. The names are pseudonyms.

These responses indicate that there is a lot of ambiguity as well as diversity in the meaning of NFE. Some viewed it as income generation, saying NFE is taught in ‘workshops’. Others viewed it as coaching, morals, manners, respect, advice, folklore and agriculture, while others saw it as associated with school work given to pupils such as cleaning the school compound. NFE has been likened to a mix of formal, informal, non-formal education as well as income generating activities. In Chapter 1, Section 1.4.2, I referred to the BAAP project which concluded that NFE should be viewed as an education system in its own right. I also underlined that NFE has the potential to reach out-of-school children. Yet the field data revealed that there are millions of out-of-school children in Uganda (as illustrated in Section 4.4.2 - on the discussion on dysfunctional Systems), but only under 70,000 are registered as receiving non-formal education, in only four centres that are formally recognised country-wide. A study by UNICEF and UNESCO (2010:19) notes that, ‘private education institutions and non-formal education programmes that are not managed by the Ministry of Education may not be included in the administrative statistics’. Moreover, ‘enrolment records in schools provide no information on out-of-school children, the number of whom must be estimated indirectly using data on enrolment and the relevant school-age population’. Therefore, the numbers of out-of-school children and adults attending NFE programmes could be higher, but there is a dearth of clear, up-to-date data to augment these claims.

NFE programmes are deemed to be more flexible and cost effective for poor children, youth and adults, who cannot access UPE. These disadvantaged and unreached groups can only be marginalised further when NFE opportunities, which are deemed to be more flexible, are non-existent. Giving an example from the village, the head teacher said that:

Non-formal education can help these drop-outs and Primary leavers because they are not engaged in any productive activity [and this would remain the case], until someone comes from out [of the community] to look for school leavers, or school drop-outs (head teacher of the village primary).

He observed that the only time you can get candidates for non-formal education in the rural areas is when an NGO or some agency comes looking for the school drop-outs in the villages:

When an organisation comes, they are identified, and are told that they want to give them [school drop-outs] some skills. That is when they appear. If no organisation comes along, they just remain doing nothing (Face-to-face interview, Head teacher, village school).

This observation by the head teacher suggests that a long term strategy to address the problem of school drop-outs, especially in the villages, is not available, and needs to be put in place, in order to tackle the problem of deprivation and poverty. This finding is discussed next.

4.3.3 Extreme Poverty

If you want to see poverty, go to the village. We think we are poor, but the extreme poverty is in the village ... People claim UPE helps the poor, not at all; it doesn't help (Field journal, University Student).

This is an excerpt from an informal discussion with a University student, from a neighbouring village where the fieldwork was conducted. When I asked the community leaders of Kamuda Sub-County whether UPE had helped to reduce poverty, one said: 'I have not seen a reduction in poverty because of UPE'. They explained this in various ways, the most significant was that: 'children study but do not complete school' (Focus group, Regin-EEC member); 'What poverty have they (Government) removed?' (Focus group discussion, EEC member John). In their view, 'someone who has gone to school, and gets gainful employment, is someone who has chased poverty'.

A Primary school leaver from the village UPE school said poor children *drop out of school because of lack of money*: 'sometimes there is no money to buy exercise books or uniform, or parents refuse the child to go to school and ask him or her to go to the garden' (Face-to-face interview, Scovia). In the same focus group, they said some children are ashamed to go to school in rags:

Some children's' clothes are torn, pure rags, they fear [going to school] saying, 'if I wear this pair of torn shorts, yet Isaac is dressed in a nice well pressed pair of shorts, Dinah, is there with a nice dress. I will not go to school'. This child will refuse to go to school, they will say, 'even if you force me, I will not go'- will you uproot this child from their home [to force them to school]? (Focus interview, Isaac).

The head teacher of the village Primary school expressed similar concerns about poor parents:

if they are asked to buy a 96 pages exercise book, they will buy one of 32 pages, which do not take long. In six days, the book is filled up, and [when children are sent for more books] such a parent will think that they are being disturbed, with their biting poverty, they will say, they cannot cope with these demands and just give up (Face-to-face interview).

The SACMEQ II (2005) survey provides data on books in Table 4.2; with a discussion on how many books were in pupils' homes. Out of the national level data of about 30 books, pupils in the Northern region were the most disadvantaged with only an average of 21.5 books at home. This is partly attributable to the insurgency in the North. This was followed by the Eastern region which had 29.6. The pupils in the Central (30.2), Western (38.9), and South West (43.8) were best placed. The availability of books and other reading materials in the home can offer additional opportunities for pupils to learn. The SACMEQ II data confirms the importance of textbooks, with poorer regions having fewer books, in comparison to the children from the more affluent regions.

Children are forced to work due to extreme poverty. According to the focus group interview with the EEC Members of Kamuda Sub-County, their children are interested in education but they are constrained by poverty which forces them to shift their priorities away from UPE, to activities that can provide immediate results, such as helping parents to run petty business. When these children start handling money, their interest in education diminishes. The Primary leavers said:

The parents give children work; those who sell local brew, give their children alcohol to sell in the local markets and village centres. If a child starts this type of work, they lose interest in education.

In regard to the children from the fishing communities where the fieldwork was conducted, an EEC member observed that:

we who live by the river, if a child starts fishing and gets money, will they want school anymore? [Rhetorical] You can plead with them but they will just stare at you, they will not want school' (Focus group, Regina).

Another level to explain the continuation of poverty is the absence of early childhood education (ECE) opportunities in the village. A retired education official said *due to poverty, children in the village are not being prepared for school through ECE*. This, he said, explains why the children are performing poorly:

Parents in the villages are poor and cannot afford to send their children to nursery schools. Unlike Kampala schools where education starts at the nursery level, kids in these areas are not ready for school by the time they join Primary school (Informal conversation).

The Ministry of Education and Sports data indicated that there are variations in enrolment in ECE in the different regions in Uganda, with pupils in Central Uganda (19,379) enrolling more than in other parts of the country while the North-Eastern region (97), where Soroti and Kamuda are located, are the least represented. Table 4.6, reveals the pre-primary enrolment by region, gender and grade. Special projects of providing good quality early childhood care, development and educational programmes, especially for the most excluded populations with low initial enrolments is necessary to ensure that these groups of children are “ready” for entry into and success in primary education through to the labour market.

Table 4.6. Pre-primary enrolment by region, gender and grade

District	Gender	Lower Baby	Middle	Top	Total
Central	Male	4,375	1,939	3,424	9,738
	Female	4,295	1,890	3,456	9,641
	Total	8,670	3,829	6,880	19,379
East	Male	1,855	1,458	1,580	4,893
	Female	1,806	1,471	1,588	4,865
	Total	3,661	2,929	3,168	9,758
North East	Male	10	13	22	45
	Female	10	17	25	52
	Total	20	30	47	97
North	Male	2,109	1,504	1,049	4,662
	Female	2,079	1,490	996	4,565
	Total	4,188	2,994	2,045	9,227
South West	Male	1342	734	1,533	3,609
	Female	1,403	788	1,656	3,847
	Total	2,745	1,522	3,189	7,456
West	Male	1,410	819	990	3,219
	Female	1,387	931	948	3,266
	Total	2,797	1,750	1,938	6,485
Grand Total	Male	11101	6,467	8,598	26,166
	Female	10,980	6,587	8,669	26,236
	Total	22,081	13,054	17267	52,402

Source: MoES 2007.

The head teacher of a neighbouring village school gave a contradictory observation regarding why enrolment remains low in the village schools. He said, that the low enrolment and retention of children in village schools is not due to poverty but rather, attitudes: ‘people complain of poverty, how can you

complain of poverty yet you have a *Kraal* [cattle paddock]? The problem is attitudes' (Informal conversation).

The 1997 UPE policy was equated with poverty eradication. The findings confirmed some but also contradicted the claim that the poor benefitted most from UPE. A World Bank (2006) assessment suggests that those in the poorest quintile gained most, within the poorest quintile, the enrolment of girls increased more than 300 per cent between 1992/1993 and 2002/2003. It is apparent that enrolment is the benchmark and variable used to justify the claim that UPE benefited the poorest quintiles most.

Table 4.7. Net Primary school enrolment by region, 1992/93 – 2002/03

Region	Girls		Boys	
	1992/93	2002/03	1992/93	2002/03
Central	69.1	85.3	69.0	85.1
Eastern	62.0	89.7	66.7	89.4
Northern	39.7	72.5	54.4	73.5
Western	60.4	88.0	62.3	84.3

Source: Higgins (2009:5).

Table 4.7 provides indicators on net enrolments between 1992/93 - 2002/03, with mixed results in the regional disparities. The analysis reveals that the North is lagging behind the rest of the country. The East is doing well, second to Central Uganda. Higgins observes that the approach that underpins UPE implementation does not appear to be targeted enough, or take into account the challenges facing the wider-North. There is no data to compare cohorts across the country for the pioneer UPE graduates and subsequent cohorts who completed the primary cycle. Disaggregated national level data can identify the most disadvantaged groups and the factors that exclude them, which is fundamental in designing better targeted equitable solutions for the shortcomings under UPE.

In all, the findings indicate that poverty has left many people with fewer opportunities to provide the basic and essential needs for their families. These poor people cannot afford the basic needs such as food, clothing, clean water, and decent shelter, let alone the numerous costs, related to accessing formal or non-formal schooling. Therefore, poverty levels have a bearing on accessing 'free' UPE, or ECE and NFE on an equal basis, between and within regions and groups.

Summary of the Perception of UPE, NFE and Extreme Poverty

The findings described in this section, suggest that, the perceptions of local people on UPE, NFE and poverty are different from the official information. To interpret the official information, we need to refer to how knowledge is socially constructed. Burr (1995:15) argues that: 'different discourses construct social phenomena in different ways, and entail different possibilities for human action'. Therefore, there are different ways of representing reality, all of which, appear to have a constraining effect upon groups and society, and it is problematic then to distinguish the 'truth' from 'untruths'? The key questions that we must ask ourselves therefore are, are the views of practitioners, administrators and bureaucrats due to lack of knowledge? Or is it due to manipulation by self-seeking politicians who want to misdirect or shape public opinion to secure and retain power? In the next section, I present findings of whether UPE is helping poor people to escape poverty.

4.4 Evidence Whether or not UPE is Helping Poor People

The findings on this research question and the key categories that emerged from the fieldwork include: equity in the allocation of human and financial resources; dysfunctional systems; and administration and management of the UPE policy. They are presented as follows.

4.4.1 Allocation of Human and Financial Resources

The SACMEQ II (2005) data Table 4.8 indicates that there are high variations in the allocation of teachers and pupils, but it also suggests that the Central Region has attracted many good teachers due to: High remuneration packages for teachers; Better infrastructure in terms of classrooms and teachers' houses; Better incentives in terms of other facilities in classrooms; Proximity to urban settings; and, access to social amenities (SACMEQ II 2005:147). On the other hand, the wider North has been ravaged by insecurity and conflict and hence teachers are discouraged from teaching in these hardship areas (Higgins 2009). The SACMEQ II data and other MoES data confirmed that resource allocations to UPE have increased since its launch in 1997. Despite the increase in public expenditure, and the reduction in leakages, it is increasingly becoming a challenge to achieve equity as well as reduce the regional inequalities, especially between the affluent regions and the poorer, insecure, and conflict prone areas. Muwanika (2008) observes that an increase in the human resources has not translated into increased retention and reduced inequalities. This is a challenge for the government to ensure that education is relevant and of good quality, and is provided at all levels for the disadvantaged and the hard-to-reach children and youths.

The other level of assessing inequity is in terms of allocation of material resources among and within schools, presented in Table 4.9, which reveals some of the variations among the regions. The highest is 5.4 which implies that there were little variations in the material resources allocation across the regions. This also implies that the targeted interventions are insignificant, and their effect is not easily discernable. Overall, Central region has a high variation (138.2) for the mathematics teacher's housing quality. Eastern region classroom space per pupil was 99.7, also exhibiting a degree of variation.

Table 4.8. Equity of human resource allocation as assessed by (a) variation among schools within regions, and (b) variation among regions

	Variation among schools within regions					Variation among regions (rho x 100)
	Central	East	North	South Western	Western	
Reading teacher prof. qualif.	129.3	86.5	102.9	96.5	56.6	0.0
Reading teacher experience	91.3	81.0	138.9	107.1	88.9	0.0
Math. teacher prof. qualif.	133.0	77.8	80.0	98.4	104.4	0.0
Math. teacher experience	88.4	82.9	110.8	79.7	139.8	0.2
School head prof. qualif.	98.8	86.7	83.4	123.2	119.6	1.5
School head experience	102.1	100.8	97.6	117.9	77.2	0.9
Inspectors/advisors visits for reading teachers	102.3	99.9	99.8	100.0	91.8	1.5
Inspectors/advisors visits for mathematics teachers	116.4	96.3	95.4	90.9	84.5	0.5
Pupil/teacher ratio	66.4	109.0	103.8	51.2	145.1	1.0

Source: SACMEQ II (2005:146)

Table 4.9. Equity of material resource allocation as assessed by (a) variation among schools within regions, and (b) variation among regions (SACMEQ II)

	Variation among schools within regions					Variation among regions (rho x 100)
	Central	East	North	South Western	Western	
Classroom furniture index by reading teacher	100.9	86.6	91.3	120.9	115.6	0.0
Classroom furniture index by mathematics teacher	117.5	90.4	89.4	108.9	101.7	0.0
Toilets per pupil	89.1	76.0	146.7	77.6	99.3	0.0
Classroom library by reading teacher	104.4	89.8	113.0	93.5	100.7	0.0
Classroom library by mathematics teacher	95.4	87.4	113.6	101.5	100.1	2.1
Classroom space per pupil	19.1	99.7	11.8	4.9	219.2	1.4
Reading teacher housing quality	112.8	72.0	98.6	105.0	114.0	2.1
Mathematics teacher housing quality	138.2	89.5	28.9	89.7	106.2	5.4
School resources index	120.2	85.8	79.8	94.1	113.0	0.0

Source: SACMEQ II (2005:149)

These variations can be explained by factors such as family income, place of residence and ethnicity as factors impacting negatively on equity. Children from poor households in geographically isolated, and remote areas, usually drop out to help parents fend for their families. Some drop out because the family cannot provide children with scholastic materials like books and pens. The PEAP strategy, according to McGee (2000:99), is addressing this problem, i.e. '[i]nequality is being tackled through objectives related to balanced growth, poverty disparities, the improvement of women's economic and political empowerment, taxation and public expenditures'. It is apparent, however, that without value addition, improved marketing and infrastructure, households engaged in agriculture cannot meaningfully improve their incomes considering that 86 per cent live in rural areas and are engaged in agriculture.

In summary, although SACMEQ II data set suggests that equity is low, the evidence from the fieldwork suggests that the equity gaps in Primary education has not closed in the past decade between the affluent regions and the remote and insecure regions. Instead, the policy is entrenching inequalities evident in the poor quality, poor performance, and completion indicators between and within regions.

4.4.2 Dysfunctional Systems

The field data confirmed that there was a rapid and dramatic access to schools when the UPE policy was launched in 1997. Even extremely poor families who may never have had the opportunity to join school were able to do so. Despite the achievements under UPE, *accessibility* was not universal, nor was the dramatic access sustained in the long term. The findings and the field data suggest that there are still millions of children who are not able to access 'free' UPE because of poverty:

In Uganda, it is estimated that over one million children are out of school. This one million is just a tip of the iceberg because there are many children who are not in school but are not known (Nafula and Karugaba quoting Mumba 2008:3).

The statistics from the Ministry of Education and Sports indicate that of the pupils who joined P1 in 1997, only 22 per cent stayed in school to sit the Primary leaving examinations in 2003. The 'free' UPE policy has not succeeded yet in ensuring that all school age-going children who enter school stay on until they complete the full primary cycle.

Access is not guaranteed if the school environment does not permit. These *out-of-school children* are from extremely poor households, or are vulnerable children such as those affected by HIV/AIDS, or are destitute children orphaned by civil conflict and/ or HIV/AIDS. Similarly, access, especially for girls, and female students, is hampered because of the lack of facilities, such as toilets. One female member of the EEC and a leader in Kamuda put it this way:

When I go on monitoring visits, there are issues affecting girls. The UPE schools have many children, but with few toilets, in some schools girls have to share toilets with boys (Focus group, Regin).

Children with special learning needs are also hindered from accessing schools because of a host of problems. The baseline assessment by World Vision (2006:57) of Kamuda provided field evidence of the challenges:

Different forms of disability such as physical, audio, speech, mental retardation and illness exist among school children ... This contributes to dropping out of school since these children are faced with many challenges yet they are not given the special attention they deserve.

The focus group with village UPE Primary leavers singled out the lack of schools for pupils with special learning needs, or specifically trained teachers and/or teaching materials or school facilities which are conducive for such children. For instance toilets in most of the UPE schools do not cater for the physically impaired children (even girls and boys share toilets in some cases). The Education Abstract for 2008, reveal that schools are incapable of dealing with autistic pupils or those who failed to develop social abilities, language and other communication skills at the usual level.

Schools in Uganda are graded by enrolment and facilities, and most of the poorly graded schools are located in the rural and remote areas. The SACMEQ II report augmented this finding in terms of the pattern of school location. The results are been presented in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10. Percentage of pupils in schools by location

Region	Urban		Distance (km)	
	%	SE	Mean	SE
Central	28.3	7.65	15.6	2.26
Eastern	19.1	5.80	22.4	3.41
Northern	14.0	6.84	25.0	5.14
South Western	24.3	10.81	20.5	3.50
Western	10.7	5.92	23.9	4.84
Uganda	20.3	3.38	21.0	1.66

Source: SACMEQ II (2005:57).

The SACMEQ data indicates that, only 20.3 per cent of the pupil's countrywide were in schools located in urban areas. The region with the highest percentage of pupils located in urban areas was Central Region (28.3 per cent). The Western Region had the lowest percentage of pupils in urban schools (10.7 per cent). The average distance from home to selected amenities was 21km, and this distance tended to be greater in the more rural Northern, Eastern, Western and South Western regions. As was expected, the distance was shortest in Central Region which is also the most urbanised.

There are several valuable points of analyses which arise from Table 4.10. 'The location, ownership, grade of the school and region where the school is found may have a bearing on the school and classroom environment which in turn can affect the teaching and learning of the pupil (Muwanika 2008). Grade I schools are likely to have better facilities, while Grade IV schools, are expected to have fewer facilities and low enrolment. It would be unrealistic to assume that schools with poor physical structure and a poor teaching learning environment,

where the majority of students live in run down homes are likely to have an education of good quality (The urban school is Grade: I; the peri-urban school is a Grade: III; and the rural school is Grade: IV).

There is consensus that the UPE policy revolutionised access to education in Uganda. It is also now acknowledged that the *unplanned and hasty introduction* of UPE led to the unmanageably disproportionate teacher-pupil ratios and pupil classroom ratio which impacted negatively on the quality of teaching.

You find that there can be 100 pupils in a P1 classroom. Perhaps you are with only 20 pupils at a time and the other 80 have their mind elsewhere (Focus group, John EEC Member).

The PTA and the SMCs reinforced this claim. They pointed out that: ‘UPE has brought serious problems because teachers cannot teach children effectively; you can find 200 children in one class, with only one teacher’ (Focus group, Elmi - EEC members). Therefore, it is not far-fetched to state that the majority of pupils in UPE schools in Uganda leave Primary school without the desired literacy and numeracy competency levels. One parent and a member of Kamuda Sub-County EEC had this to say about her Primary 4 child in a village UPE school:

Our children do not know how to write! I have a child in P.4, he asks me, ‘*Mum how do they write this?*’ then I ask him, ‘how do they teach you in school? He insists ‘*teach me also how to write*’ [Child pleads] - I’m now even thinking about returning this child to P1, he is useless, he cannot read at all! (Focus group, Regin).

In the foreword to the Ministry of Education and Sports Guidelines on in-service for teachers, it is stated that the field data revealed that a high proportion of pupils in Primary schools could neither read, write nor communicate effectively (MoES 2005).

The Ministry of Education and Sports introduced the automatic promotion policy, not only to improve the transition and completion rates, but to cope with the high number of repeaters and to create space and decongest classrooms. There is evidence of very poor performance in examinations, but teachers are barred

from making children repeat classes, and children who perform poorly are under no obligation to repeat classes. Zuze (2008), in her study of Uganda, observed that, parents or principals encourage repetition if there is reason to believe that the student will be unsuccessful in primary leaving examinations, however, the new policy directives have mandated MoES to take action and punitive measures against head teachers who force students to repeat classes under the automatic promotion policy. The SACMEQ II (2005) recommended designating an oversight function to policy officers to ensure that this automatic promotion policy directive is adhered to. The deputy head teacher of the Municipality school said:

the Government tells us, there must be mass promotion whether a child knows or doesn't know ... now what do you expect out of a candidate from P.7 class who ... cannot communicate, and cannot count, will, that child come out of poverty easily? No definitely! (Face-to-face interview).

In a focus group discussion in the Village, an EEC member noted that, '[i]n UPE, children move from grade to grade regardless of whether or not they have passed, *they must be promoted*' (Elmi-EEC member). The perception of these community members is that the UPE has become a system where students move from one class to the next without necessarily learning. The impacts of this policy may have longer term implications on quality, equity and learning outcomes between and within regions.

Further, the findings suggest that the current system is inadequate in terms of assessing real learning, often leading to 'examination-driven' teaching. The prevalence of 'rote learning' illustrates the dysfunctional system, and the absence of quality education. This gave credence that the 'rote' approach to teaching and learning, and the preoccupation with results, does not nurture creative thought, character development, or provide the right attitudes, except the ability to pass examinations. One participant noted that: 'because of pamphlets,⁹ students are so stereotyped and are not versatile' (Informal conversation, Ekesu) as the learning is merely to pass exams not for life. This raises serious questions for policy makers. UPE was supposed to be the great equaliser, however, without quality education, the poor learning outcomes offer no way out of poverty, especially for poor families who are most affected.

The policy approach and the poor quality of UPE is one of the causes of the high drop-out rates, especially among children in the poor locations and regions. The EEC members summed up the absence of quality teaching and why children have lost interest in UPE, leading to school-drop out, in the following terms:

Teachers live far from the school. A child may be interested in school, [however, when] the teacher is absent, the child plays all day long, until evening, and then returns home. Tomorrow, the same pattern is repeated. Such a child will say, *'I am just 'roaming' about in school on a daily basis and there is no one to teach me'*, *'I will go to school today again and find no one to teach me'*. If the teacher comes, it could be at 9:00am or 10:00am, or any time that pleases them, [despite the official starting time of 8:00am]. So how will a child be interested in education? (Focus group, Regin).

In Chapter 2, Section 2.4.2, Figure 2.2, I depicted the levels of absenteeism of teachers. The findings of the fieldwork of the high level of teacher absenteeism, particularly in the remote regions, reflects the challenge faced by most teachers: many schools lack teachers' houses, forcing teachers to commute long distances, often along insecure routes, and are paid low salaries without hardship supplementation (Women Commission for Refugee Women and Children 2005). Alubisia (2005) and Zuze (2009) found that Uganda children, especially those in the remote areas, who were required to walk long distances to school or do farm work before going to school sometimes, absent themselves from school. Table 4.10 indicates distance as a major factor of why pupils absent themselves from school. The Education Abstract (2007) estimates that this distance is on average between 3 Km to 5 Km, but, it can stretch up to 25 Km.

Illness, family reasons, fees and work are among the other factors causing absenteeism and eventual drop out of pupils from schools as given in Table 4.11. The SACMEQ II data indicates that the most common reason for absenteeism was illness (56.8 per cent) followed by family reasons (23.3 per cent). This may include the need for some children to take care of sick parents or siblings among other reasons. It should be a matter of concern that illness is the primary cause of absence. Malaria and HIV/AIDS were prevalent in Uganda, and could be the causes of illness among pupils and/or their parents or siblings.

Table 4.11. Percentages and sampling errors for reasons of pupils' absenteeism

Region	Illness		Family reasons		Fees		Work	
	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE
Central	60.2	4.25	29.4	2.99	18.5	4.14	15.1	2.69
Eastern	49.4	3.18	25.9	3.67	11.6	2.00	24.8	3.19
Northern	63.1	5.47	14.9	2.65	9.1	2.39	17.9	2.00
South West	50.8	6.25	20.4	3.96	14.4	3.27	17.6	2.51
Western	68.0	5.60	20.5	3.69	15.4	3.76	19.3	5.70
Uganda	56.8	2.08	23.3	1.63	13.7	1.42	19.5	1.48

Source: SACMEQ II (2005:59).

Besides these given factors, the documentary evidence from the secondary data sources indicate that factors for dropping out include: lack of interest, pregnancy, early marriage, fees (unable to pay), job, sickness, family responsibility, dismissed due to disobedience and other factors (MoES 2008).

The EEC members observed that the previous Governments were more supportive of teachers' welfare:

In the past, the Government helped schools with building teachers' houses, but now they have left this to parents and yet the parents are poor, they cannot build houses that are fit for teachers. If they [the parents] build the grass thatched mud brick houses, these may crumble within two months. On top of that, the teachers will not want to live in these houses.

The SACMEQ II data support this finding, indicating that the overall housing conditions of teachers' were worrying. From the results of the data analysed, only 20.5 per cent and 10.4 per cent of the Primary 6 pupils were being taught by reading teachers and mathematics teachers respectively who resided in houses of acceptable conditions (SACMEQ II 2005). The regional distribution indicated that for the reading teachers, 28.1 per cent of primary 6 pupils in South Western region were taught by teachers who resided in houses with

acceptable conditions yet, the Eastern region had the lowest corresponding figure of only 7.8 per cent. In regard to the mathematics teachers, the Central region emerged with the highest percentage of 22.4 per cent and the Northern region trails with 0.7 per cent. Housing conditions can be a disincentive for a good quality education; this is therefore a challenge for the Government. The conditions of the reading teachers seem to be better in comparison to the mathematics teachers. In fact, the percentage of reading teachers residing in houses of acceptable conditions was more or less double that of mathematics teachers living in houses of similar conditions. Although the Government has increased funding for construction, the state of the housing for teachers is worrying. The SACMEQ II data provide a percentage distribution of teachers living in acceptable conditions given in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12. Percentages and sampling errors for teacher housing in acceptable conditions

Region	Reading teacher		Mathematics teacher	
	%	SE	%	SE
Central	26.4	7.38	22.4	7.89
Eastern	7.8	3.74	7.6	4.55
Northern	22.6	9.39	0.7	0.74
South West	28.1	12.47	10.7	10.99
Western	29.2	11.40	11.5	9.74
Uganda	20.5	3.51	10.4	2.85

Source: SACMEQ II (2005:80).

A selection of photographs taken during the fieldwork, of the teachers' houses, in the rural village, peri-urban and city are exhibited in Appendix VIII, Picture 4. The houses, in the rural areas that were built using local labour and locally available materials were substandard and teachers had not entered them when I completed the data collection. I was told that they [community] had been working on them for nearly one year.

I inquired why the performance and quality of schools in Soroti district is very poor, in an informal discussion with a Senior Official of the Soroti Core Primary Teachers' College (PTC). In his perception, the pupils in the Northern and the Eastern regions are performing poorly due to the *quality of teachers*. He said: 'teaching is very delicate - teachers are facing very harsh conditions - if you do not pay teachers, they will not teach ... without adequate housing and payment, you should not expect much', yet the study found that there are exceptionally high expectations of these teachers and headteachers who are overworked and underpaid.

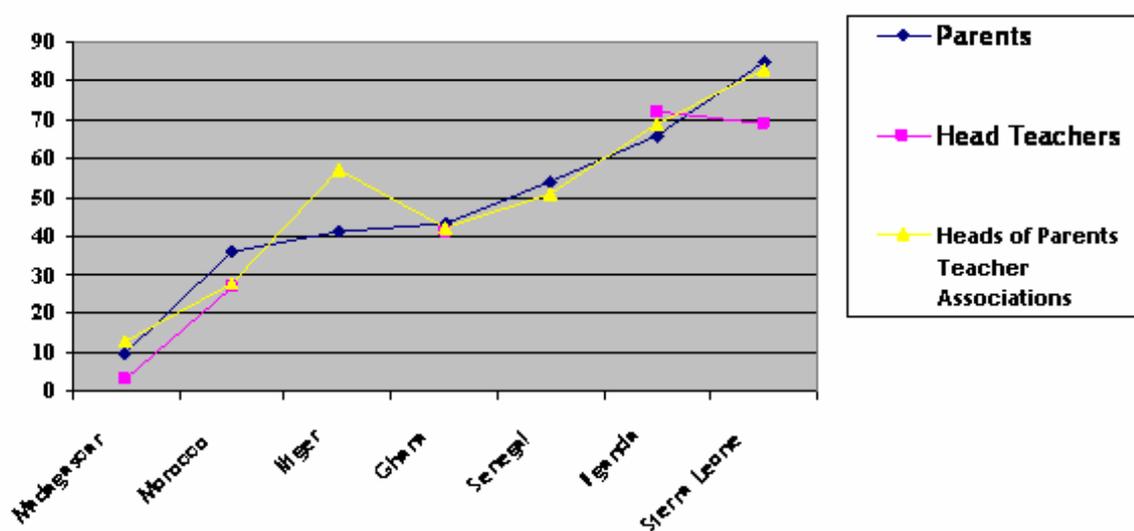
The community leaders held the same view, observing that the *late payment of teacher salaries* is a serious problem affecting the implementation of the UPE policy: 'in the past, teachers' salaries were paid on time, sometimes they were paid even before the end of the month, but now teachers can stay for two or three months before receiving their pay'; and: 'when the salary delays the teacher will just abandon teaching. If they are questioned by parents, they will say *'what should I eat'*? Such a teacher may instead go to work in his/her garden!' (Focus group, Kamuda, EEC members). It was observed by a retired Education Official, during an informal interview that, getting substitute teachers is a major problem due to the budget constraints: For example 'when they [female teachers] go on maternity leave there is no replacement because there are no funds to hire temporary teachers'. This is often a loss to the school because of the shortage of teachers.

The strategies put in place, especially for those children in poor, remote, regionally deprived peripheral districts, where most of the disadvantaged live and the attrition rates phenomenal seem not to be working well, partly because of the dysfunctional system. Strategies to improve the dysfunctional system need to be considered as part of a holistic approach, considering the realities that face Uganda in general and UPE in particular. Related to the dysfunctional systems is the concern about how the policy was being administered and managed. These issues are presented next.

4.4.3 Administration and Management

The SACMEQ II (2005) study did not discuss inefficiencies in the administration and management of UPE in depth, but a study by Transparency International (2010), produced within the framework of the African Educational Watch (AEW) focusing on management of public funds, identified the forms of corrupt practices common in countries surveyed including: illegal collection of fees; embezzlement of funds; and abuse of power. Some of these practices were highlighted during the field work, with the key impacts given, as the high repetition rates, high drop-out, poor performance as well as the (mis)management of the resources available for the implementation of this policy. The figure given indicates the perceptions of Ugandan parents, head teachers, and PTAs who think that the education system is affected by corruption.

Figure 4.1. Proportion of parents, head teachers and heads of PTAs who think “the education system is affected by corruption”



Source: Transparency International (2010).

The fieldwork indicated that corruption was evident: in the form of Government officials who exaggerated statistics of students, and classroom blocks; the poor workmanship in the construction of shoddy classroom blocks; and poor regard for professionalism. The very low completion rates may also be attributed to the

enrolment figures being inflated by the respective school authorities (Muwanika 2008). The participants said that *corruption* has become endemic, causing loss of confidence in UEP. One EEC member said: ‘corruption has brought the collapse of everything in Uganda’ (Focus group, Mary), while another lamented the inefficiency, waste, and corruption in the schools:

You find that headmasters are just ‘eating’¹⁰ the money, if you check, this money has done nothing in the schools. In the past you would find that schools had games’ uniform, scouts’ uniforms, these are not available anymore (Focus group, John-EEC member).

The following statement, published by the Danish Association for International Co-operation (MS-Uganda 2006), to highlight this problem of bad administration and management sums up the dysfunctional system under which UPE was operating. It states that corruption in UPE manifests itself in many forms: ‘ghost’ teachers and pupils, false accountability, forgery, embezzlement, abuse of office, influence peddling in the procurement process of scholastic materials, shoddy construction of school buildings and bribery among others. The corruption has left the country saddled with low quality education, substandard infrastructure and excessive debt.

I will expound on *accountability* here as this is another aspect associated with corruption and was clearly projected during the fieldwork, to underscore the bad administration and management of UPE. Local people said: ‘you find people accounting for funds stating that this money was used for such an activity. Nothing! Just forgery accountability’ (Focus group, John - EEC member). This corruption and misuse of UPE funds has caused cynicism among the local people, who think leaders are using UPE as a means to steal state funds and donor money: ‘that is a gimmick for them [at the top] to eat the money, that is all, then they claim that they are providing ‘free’ education without any benefit’ (Focus group, John - EEC member). One man in Kumi district expressed similar sentiments, saying, when there is ‘eating’ or ‘any benefit’, leaders do not inform people in communities, but when there are no benefits; information is passed on immediately (Kiirya 2003).

The SMC and the PTA for the village school felt that there were also still major problems with *transparency* among the school administrators and the lack of transparency among Government officials. Disadvantaged pupils, and those living in the remote and regionally deprived areas, who cannot afford the costs of private education, or non-tuition costs under UPE are most vulnerable, as they suffer most from mismanagement and bad administration of a programme which is intended to address equity.

Summary of the Evidence Whether or not UPE has Helped Poor People

There are various interpretations given as to the effects of the UPE and poverty reduction initiatives depending on who you ask. Burr (1995:5) observes that: '[r]eality is socially constructed by interconnected patterns of communication behaviour', and there is a tendency for those in power sometimes to misrepresent reality by glorifying things which are less glorious'. The availability of statistics without the critical examination of the authenticity of the data or awareness of the implications can be counter-productive. The effects of the UPE policy on teacher conditions, remuneration, teacher professionalism, or motivation due to dysfunctional systems and bad administration impacted negatively, particularly on the extremely poor families as evidenced in this thesis need further analysis. It is argued that poor people were given an opportunity to enrol in school, some for the first time, however, the claims that poor people benefited most from the UPE policy needs not be taken for granted as demonstrated by the phenomenal attrition rates and the large numbers of out-of-school children in spite of UPE. The social construction of UPE in the dominant discourses can marginalise those whom it is claimed have benefitted most, if enrolment rather than learning outcomes are taken for granted as the yardstick to measure the success of this policy. The findings on this concept and its effects on poor people is discussed next.

4.5 Social Construction of Poor People

We know very well that some things are not working well, but if you went to the Minister today, she will definitely say that all is well, and that UPE is successful. So even while responding, I will give what I know is the official information. But I may have my views as an individual, which may be different from official information (Face-to-face interview, Senior Government Official).

The above statement, during an interview with a Senior Government education official, provides a succinct picture of how the dominant UPE and poverty discourse is socially constructed through our daily interactions and communications. Three categories: valuing education, attitudes, and responsibility, provide the basis for presenting these insights on the social construction of poor people that emerged from the field data.

4.5.1 Valuing Education

The recurring finding from the fieldwork data is that most parents in the villages and the rural areas do not *value education*. In a focus group discussion, an EEC member in Kamuda said:

UPE came for those in poverty, who could not send their children to school, that is where it has helped, we cannot say it is not true, it has helped ... otherwise there are children who would never have gone to school, because there are some homes that are in extreme poverty, they cannot even afford clothes, UPE has helped this category of families (Focus group, Meru).

Even with the acknowledgement that UPE has helped poor people, the social construction of poor people presents a paradox. In an informal interview with a World Vision community worker, in Kamuda Sub-County, said some parents say: 'even educated people die'. When you encourage them to send their children to school, they tell you, 'give yours education so they can lead us'. I asked why this was so? His response was:

Perhaps it is the approach that people use to talk to these parents. For example, such a parent may be with his/her children in the garden [to augment family income]. If you ask why their children are not at school, they will tell you off, because the value of education is not viewed as an immediate need when they are struggling to survive (Informal interview, Ebiru).

The same community worker gave this assessment of a typical parent in the village:

The parents do not understand the value of education. They think that education ends at the school premises. They do not help their children with school assignments or homework. Instead, parents go with their children to drink [alcohol] at the Centre and return home late in the night ... They sell firewood and get money for alcohol ... but do not use it for their children (Informal interview).

The head teacher of the village UPE school shared the same view:

Some parents do not take time to follow up with their children or to try to find out what they learnt at school ... such a parent does not have an interest in the child's education ... if a child misses school, some parents do not take the necessary steps to follow up (Face-to-face interview).

This is in contrast with some parents who support their children with homework and their progress in the school. SACMEQ II survey in Uganda posed the question: to what extent did family members help children with their schoolwork as the home can play an important role in motivating children and supporting them in their school work? The responses are varied as indicated in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13. Home assistance ‘most of the time’ with school related work

Region	Ensure homework is done		Help with the homework		Look at school work done	
	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE
Central	37.7	3.85	27.0	4.15	33.7	3.63
Eastern	25.2	3.22	17.3	2.38	27.8	2.70
Northern	28.4	2.85	21.1	3.00	32.9	4.37
South Western	35.5	5.80	27.0	4.57	26.4	3.10
Western	33.9	7.64	19.7	4.74	29.9	5.00
Uganda	31.5	1.92	22.2	1.64	30.2	1.62

Source: SACMEQ II (2005:64).

It is noted that 31 per cent of the primary six pupils had parents who made sure they did their homework. The Central Region had the highest percentage of such parents with 37.6 per cent, while the Eastern Region was the lowest with 25.2 per cent. This has implications in the achievement in the terminal examinations and the competency tests such as NAPE, conducted by UNEB. This observation also helps to explain some of the responses given by the Primary leavers in the interviews. For example, a Primary leaver said, some parents ask their children: ‘Do they eat ‘school’ (literally)?’ (Focus group, Village/Kamuda, Dinnah), interpreted as - ‘is school food?’

The following transcript, which is an extract from the dialogue from a focus group discussion, provides a succinct example of the thinking of ordinary people in the village as expressed by UPE Primary leavers:

Isaac: If the villagers see that your children are in school and theirs are not they will say [*mimicking the voice of a villager*] ‘even if your children go to school, they will achieve nothing’

Dinnah: The educated people will also die
[*The discussion then turns to marriage*]

Isaac: They will find us down in earth [when they die and are buried]

Dinnah: Don't those who have not gone to school get married?
Isaac: The educated people are just like us, they breathe like us ...
Dinnah: All that I care is that they [children] have food.

This dialogue suggests that no one is immortal and schooling does not make one escape death as everyone including educated people must die too. Similarly, marriage, which is highly valued by the local communities, is possible whether or not, one has gone to school.

In another focus group, the SMC and PTA representatives said some parents literally say: 'you send yours [to school], leave mine alone, even if they want to remain stupid let them be' (Informal interview, Ebiru). Girls are mostly affected by these norms. The Ministry of Education and Sports observes that 'Negative cultural norms and values of some social groups continue to undermine girl education efforts' (MoES 2007:37). Some local people however disagree with the view that the poor people do not value education. One EEC member from Kamuda said:

Our children have interest in school, but only they have problems, that is why they are losing interest in school, especially our poor children ... some parents cannot buy even a single exercise book, they cannot give the child uniform, or food (Focus group, Betty).

The high expectations of UPE, and the form in which the policy was implemented, caused cynicism among local people who genuinely thought the launch of UPE in 1997 had brought cost free education, but were disappointed due to the extra costs for accessing UPE. The high attrition rates among poor pupils explains the misconception that local people do not value education. This paradox is further explained by the discussion on the attitudes of the local people, presented next.

4.5.2 Attitudes

As illustrated in the previous Section 4.5.1, some local people do not 'value education', and therefore their attitude towards education has been socially constructed as negative. The fieldwork data from the qualitative interviews

suggest that attitudes are closely associated with the level of education of the parents as presented in Section 4.2.3. To illustrate this point, the head teacher of the village UPE school said: ‘parents who have not gone to school do not care about the importance of education’ (Face-to-face interview). His counterpart, the deputy head teacher of the Municipality UPE school in Soroti said:

parents who have never gone so far with school ... have negative attitudes towards their children having continued education because a parent may utter a word that may actually hinder that child’s interest like, ‘*if I have not gone to school, will you manage what is coming ahead of you*’ ... parents give them negative feelings towards their education, which actually moulds their negative interest which lead to their dropping out (Face-to-face interview).

In a focus group, one Primary school leaver from the Municipality school, said: ‘parents living in the village, tell their children to do some work at home, and they tell them that even them they did [parents] not go to school, so why should the children go to school?’ (Focus group, Isaiah). One Primary school leaver from the village UPE school said, ‘parents will say ‘even if my child does not go to school, it does not matter, aren’t there people who have never gone to school?’ (Focus group, Dinnah).

The observations from the field data suggest that UPE was viewed in terms of its ability to increase the bride price or to get a ‘fine’ if a girl was forced to leave school after getting pregnant.¹¹ One Primary leaver of a village school said: ‘parents, go saying, ‘let’s go and collect a fine’, their heart is, ‘*let’s go for the fine*’, that is how they are benefiting from UPE, but if a child has not gone to school, there is no way her parents can go for a fine’ (Focus group, Dinnah). These findings from the fieldwork suggested that girls are viewed as a source of wealth from bride-price, and that there is an assurance of a fine if the girl is attending UPE.

The deputy head teacher of the peri-urban school in Soroti Municipality attributed the negative attitudes to culture:

when a girl reaches a certain level, and possibly the adolescent stage, parents begin uttering negative words towards that girl's development, that automatically makes most of our girls to drop out (Face-to-face interview).

In Section 4.1.1, I identified gender as a cause of inequalities. In this section, I refocus the discussion, on the negative gender perceptions attributed to attitudes. Girls are more likely than boys to drop out of school because of social norms. Parents believe that when their boys marry young, they bring extra labour into the household in terms of grandchildren. While the perception is that once the girl is married, it is her husband's family and not her parents who will benefit, hence the reluctance to invest in the education of girls.

The administrative data suggested that Uganda had reached gender parity due to interventions to promote gender equality in education (illustrated in Section 2.2.5). However, the field data contradicts this finding, suggesting that the national level data has masked substantial gender gaps and disparities especially for the most vulnerable in the remote and rural areas, where there is a very high dropout rate among girls in comparison to boys. The findings suggest that there is a need to move beyond gender parity, towards gender equity and empowerment to address the gender inequalities.

Further, the negative attitudes towards UPE are deepened due to the perceived low market returns on education and the mismatch between skills acquired and the skills required by the labour market. It is a long standing problem in Uganda, that the education system is inappropriate as the training produces job-seekers rather than innovative job-creators, which partly explains the concern about the lack of opportunities after formal primary education. The focus groups with the SMC and PTA representatives said that:

When you went to school in the past, you had hope for getting a job, but now it is up to you to carry your own burden and look for your own job, that is why children leave school early to start looking out for opportunities and jobs (Focus group, Meru- PTA member).

The community leaders from the village noted that UPE *divorces the school leavers from the society* it is supposed to be preparing them for because it is not driving their employability or productivity, or helping them to help their communities. In an interview with a Senior city education official she said she was doubtful whether UPE is helping extremely poor families:

I'm not sure if anyone has done this study in my village, what I know is [that] if people get in little education, they shun labour. They sit in the trading centres doing nothing. When they go home they demand, soap, water, yet they haven't earned it (Face-to-face interview).

In a focus group interview in Kamuda Sub-County (as if to reinforce the perception of the city education official) one of the EEC members said:

To make it worse, these days if you do not have a certificate [of tertiary education], you cannot get a job, so a child [UPE graduate] just remains home. Possibly, this child cannot even do farm work, they start loitering and playing poker - he is useless, he can bring no good (Focus group, John).

The '*role models*' in these villages are school drop-outs and school leavers who remain in the villages, or those who return to the village having failed to find work in the towns or city. The head teacher of a neighbouring UPE school in Kamuda said parents refer scornfully to the unemployed school leavers, who return to the village, after failing to make it in the towns or city, as an example of the 'benefit of UPE'. They say: 'look at so and so, he went to school but he has nothing to show for it' (Field Journal), or 'hasn't he returned here [to the village] to join us?' (Focus group, Meru, PTA member).

There is an example of an agriculture university graduate who completed his education and returned to the remote, rural village, and is engaged in local farming because he could not find paid work in the Government Offices. The local people do not see any difference, between themselves and this graduate who spent many years in school, but returned to do the same subsistence farming, like those who dropped out much earlier. That is why local people are disillusioned with UPE.

These negative attitudes have caused apathy. The EEC Members, for instance, observed that:

They [Government] have not clearly educated parents about UPE, how does it work, what good does it bring! If that was done, then perhaps UPE could have changed people's attitude and expectations and people could have known what is expected of them [from this policy] (Focus group, Kamuda John).

These factors have led policy makers and bureaucrats to conclude that the people in the villages and other remote and rural areas have a negative attitude toward education. This is then used to make the case that these parents do not take the responsibility for the education of their children seriously as is discussed in the next section.

4.5.3 Responsibility

The false perception that UPE is 'free' has undermined the parental responsibility, especially of poor parents, towards the education of their children. Poor parents were labelled as irresponsible and accused of 'stubbornly' refusing to take the responsibility of sending their children to school. The fieldwork findings indicated that these views were expressed freely through the media, informal conversations and the face-to-face and focus group interviews. For instance, the Minister of Education and Sports, Namirembe Bitamazire warned that: 'Errant parents will be treated as saboteurs and therefore, will have to face the law' (Mugerwa *et al.*, 2008:2). Ironically, the findings of the fieldwork revealed that 'cost' and not 'irresponsibility' is the key reason why poor parents do not send their children to 'free' UPE School.

Table 4.14 provides a summary of the reasons why children left UPE before completing, with cost as the predominant reason, both in rural and urban areas. For example, in 2005/06, 45 per cent and 59 per cent of pupils' out-of-school in rural and urban areas respectively, cited cost as the key reason for dropping out (Kasirye 2009). Although the UPE policy offers 'free' education, schools in urban areas are allowed to levy additional charges for electricity, sanitation and other related services. On the other hand, some schools in rural areas levy

discretionary fees to provide lunch and school requirements. Apart from these discretionary school levies, parents are supposed to provide school uniforms as well as other school materials.

As a result of these constraining factors, hundreds of thousands of children, if not millions of children (as illustrated by Karugaba citing Mumbe 2008), especially from the poorer households, are not in school, or drop out, hence, access to or the substantive learning that should drive the education system, through UPE, is not taking place. By downplaying the financial impediments associated with accessing UPE for the poorer households, on account that school fees had been abolished, the Ministry of Education and Sports may have misdiagnosed the issue of parental responsibility. 'Children from poor homes are far more likely to drop out than children from wealthier homes, underlining the interaction of poverty with education costs' (Hunt 2008; cited in UNESCO 2011:49). The table that follows, illustrates the factors impeding accessing to UPE, all of which are not directly caused by irresponsible parents.

Table 4.14. Reasons for dropping out of school (individuals who never completed Primary school), 1999/2000-2005/06 (per cent)

	2005/06		2002/03		1999/2000	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Cost of schooling too expensive	44.6	58.8	58.1	68.9	65.4	75.2
Not willing to attend further	16	7.9	-	-	-	-
Sickness or calamity in the family	7.4	4.5	-	-	-	-
Parents did not want	6.8	4.7	16.1	15.9	11	9.1
Poor academic progress	5.2	4.1	-	-	-	-
Help with home, family, or farm work	4.4	2.6	7.1	3.2	7.6	3.8
Pregnancy	4.1	3.8	3.6	2.2	3.5	1.4
Other reasons	11.5	13.6	15.1	9.8	12.5	10.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Kasirye (2009)

Notes: Other reasons include: completed desired schooling, poor school quality, and schools being too far away

"-" The dashes imply that the particular response category was not included in the specific survey.

The UNHS (2005/2006) survey contradicts the SACMEQ II (2005) data in regard to the issue of school drop-out. For instance, whereas the UNHS data indicate that cost of schooling is the main cause of the drop out with 45 and 59 per cent for pupils in rural and urban areas, as stated earlier, SACMEQ II gives a figure of 13 per cent for national level data. The SACMEQ II survey identifies *illness* at 57 per cent at national level as the biggest cause of drop out, while UNHS stipulates that illness or calamity in the family accounts for only 7.4 per cent and 4.5 per cent for rural and urban households. These discrepancies suggest that there could be problems in the methods used in the data collection and reporting.

The focus groups highlighted alcoholism as a major problem in the villages. This could be taken as a sign of irresponsibility and the reason why some parents are not involved in the education of their children. One Primary leaver from the peri-urban Soroti Municipality school put it in this way: ‘Actually, some of their parents are drunkards, and some are not willing to offer support to the children’ (Focus interview, Petero); while another Primary leaver from the rural village Primary school had this to say:

Also, a person is a miser, the person is boozing until there is no money left for buying exercise books or uniform ... a child goes to school and gets ashamed. S/he says: ‘I have torn clothes, I do not have exercise books, and other children are laughing at me’ - such a child becomes embarrassed, and abandons school (Focus interview, Dinnah).

The World Vision (2006:65) baseline assessment in Kamuda cited the views of one elder who expressed his scepticism of UPE, saying: ‘my neighbour wasted his money educating his children and the children are home without jobs, I will never waste my money educating my children’. This apathy, easily socially constructed as irresponsibility, is not restricted to the rural schools. The deputy head teacher of the peri-urban UPE school in Soroti said: ‘UPE has not helped them to eradicate poverty; instead it has helped to increase poverty’ (Face-to-face interview). These two divergent views of the relevance of education can all constitute irresponsibility.

Further, large families are blamed on irresponsible parents. Households in the village have large family sizes, and this has been singled out, as a major factor

as to why they remain in their poverty. The documentary evidence contained in the Soroti District 3-Year Development Plan (2006/7-2008/9) and the World Vision (2006) baseline assessment found that families in Kamuda Sub-County have 7-8 children and a fertility rate of 7.4 per cent with the largest number of children in the entire district compared, to the 3.2 per cent population growth rate nationally. *The 2006 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey* indicated that uneducated mothers had about three more children on average than women with at least some secondary education (MFPED 2010:5). It also noted that, women living in households in the lowest wealth quintile (i.e., the 20% poorest households) had almost twice as many children as women in the highest wealth quintile (i.e., the 20% wealthiest households) (MFPED 2010).

The World Bank (2008:7) observed that, 'In many rural settings, the "economic" value of women and children was viewed in the context of their availability for household and farming work'. The Report pointed out that education diminishes this outdated outlook to family size, with parents tending towards fewer and potentially better educated children who could have good and well-paying jobs.

Rural Ugandan families tend to have many children. Reflecting on the problems of large families, one SMC leader in the rural village school gave this situation:

for example, I have a wife and five children, if we are faced with death [in the extended family] the bereaved family will bring their fifteen children under my care, this adds to my poverty, and that is what would put me to breaking point (Focus group, Meru- EEC member).

The focus group with the EEC members observed that large families provide challenges in modern times: 'people in the west [Europe and North America] control their family size, possibly comprising one to two children. If they have many children that could be four, but us here in Kamuda, it is 12 children on average!' (Focus group, Regin - EEC Member). To ease the 'burden' of caring for a large family, the families in Kamuda, like most rural households with poor economic backgrounds, marry away girls at a very young age, causing them to drop out of UPE. Boys from such households are forced to work as casual labourers or in gardens before or after school to pay for school related expenses.

Others also marry young, and are forced to stop school to start working to take care of their families.

Some parents in the village are suspicious of contraception, which is one way of controlling large families: 'If you tell someone to stop giving birth, you are looking for a quarrel, for serious trouble, literally looking for death!' (*Said lightly*) (Focus group, John- EEC member). Therefore, large family sizes are the norm because children are needed to help with household and farming work. However, these large families increase the financial burden on the bread winner and decrease the household's ability to save and invest productively. This increases poverty and leads to the failure by these families to meet the hidden cost of schooling. Large families are thus a marker of the education levels and the poverty status of the households.

There are also other contradictions that emerged from the fieldwork. The PTA and SMC leaders said: 'UPE has caused parents to become lazy ... even if you ask them to collect money, parents refer you to UPE which [the President said] must be completely free, so it has become completely difficult to work with parents' (Focus group, Elmi- EEC member). In terms of getting them to make community contributions: 'They said some parents are now using UPE as an excuse not to participate in school community activities'. These community leaders predicted that: 'UPE will entrench illiteracy and disempower poor people' (Focus group, Mary). This statement summarises the predicament of poor people, and suggests that inequalities may intensify under the UPE policy, between the poor families and the wealthier families because of the complex interplay of the barriers both outside and within the education system that are inhibiting the provision of equitable educational opportunities for all.

The focus group with the SMC and PTA leaders suggested that the local people, even those who were educated, lapsed into illiteracy because of the impacts of the decades of insecurity and armed conflict of 1980s, 1990s, and the early 21st century, saying:

people have just come out of armed conflict and insurgency, people are starting from scratch they are ignorant, even the educated (Focus group, Elmi- EEC member).

The EEC members said parents are so fixated with the President's directive that no child should be charged fees under UPE. These parents are well aware that UPE is greatly under-funded. Wealthy parents in the affluent regions, have disregarded these political statements and are (un)officially subsidising UPE due to the unpredictability and the acute funding gaps of providing UPE. With respect to the poor rural village schools, an EEC member said:

The parents here are completely adamant; they do not want to hear anything to do with [paying user costs for] the education of their children, they are contented that the 'free' UPE is there, but that which is free is a farce (Focus group, Mary).

The feelings of these community leaders is that parents should not rely entirely on the Government's rhetoric about 'free' UPE and instead help their children where they can, as well as the teachers who are grappling with poor pay and teaching conditions under UPE, otherwise they will be left out and become further marginalised. She said UPE has become useless: 'I think people should forget about UPE, and just do something so that your child may study' (Focus group, Regin- EEC member).

In summary, irresponsibility has manifested itself in different ways such as laziness, lack of interest and the desire for large family sizes. These problems are common mainly in the rural areas, while in most urbanised and the affluent areas and regions, parents prefer small and quality families and pay special interest in the education of their children. The elite and well-to-do families are more forthcoming in terms of providing the requested support from school heads for their children for two reasons; first they are financially able to meet these extra costs. Second, they understand the value of education for their children. The parents and community members, especially in the poor areas need to be sensitised to their obligations and responsibilities in regard to realising the legal and moral right of their children to education, in view, of the indifference as well as the, shortcomings, the capacity and financial constraints, of the Government, in ensuring quality education for all.

Summary of the Social Construction of Poor People

The findings of this research question unearthed truths from the untruths in the official dominant discourse. The primary role of 'social construction' according to Haslanger (2005 citing Hackings 1999:6) 'has been for raising consciousness'. It challenges the taken-for-granted knowledge by critiquing the status quo. The socially constructed view that being poor is by choice, affirms the multidimensionality of poverty espoused by Sen (1999) of powerlessness, insecurity, helplessness and exploitation. Lack of interest, and negative attitudes are dissected in this section as conditions caused not only by the inability of parents to meet the discretionary costs of UPE, but also because of the poor quality of UPE. In some cases, children were learning in poorly resourced, overcrowded classrooms, taught by unqualified and under-motivated teachers. According to the 2006 Educational Statistical Abstract, at least 25 per cent of all Primary school teachers were not trained. The majority of these untrained teachers are in remote and hard-to-reach areas that fail to attract qualified teachers (MoES 2007 cited in Kasirye 2009). Although children and their parents are blamed for negative attitudes towards UPE, the underlying causes are not adequately considered or analysed to understand why children drop out or abscond from school. The next and last section in this chapter will focus on the changes necessary to empower these disadvantaged children, youths and adults so as to ensure learning for all.

4.6 Designing UPE, NFE and Poverty Initiatives to Reduce Inequalities

Five key areas of desirable changes to make education equitable emerged from the fieldwork findings. First, was a suggestion to re-name and re-launch UPE to give it meaning. Second, was the need to create some income generating activities to address the extreme poverty experienced in the country, especially in the Northern and North-Eastern regions. Third, policies and practice need to be informed by research to avoid further marginalisation of disadvantaged groups. Fourth, is encouraging community participation, in order to make UPE, NFE, and poverty eradication strategies meaningful. Fifth, is ensuring a conducive teaching-learning environment.

4.6.1 Re-name and Re-launch UPE

They should give UPE another name (Focus group, member of the EEC).

This suggestion for the re-naming of UPE was made emphatically by a key member of the EEC. UPE is synonymous with free education, yet parents paid for discretionary costs for their children to access UPE despite the elimination of user fees. Therefore, participants argued that UPE must be re-named and re-launched to give it its true ‘meaning’ taking into account contributions made by parents.

The thinking of the community members was that, if the discretionary costs and the contributions by parents could be recognised, and made official, and counted as fee contributions, to get children through Primary school, that would be more helpful and meaningful to the poor and low-income households. The Government could then be requested to pay for real costs for post-Primary and tertiary education through providing cash subsidies and scholarships for the extremely poor households, who are incapable of meeting the costs of accessing education at the higher levels.

One unfortunate result of reprioritising the Government’s expenditure from tertiary to primary level is that children from extremely poor households can no

longer have hope for a post-Primary or tertiary education despite the Universal Secondary Education (USE) launched in 2007. In its current form, USE is not free as many children who attained the 28 cut off points for eligibility for USE were still not in school because they cannot afford the non-tuition costs levied to access USE. The ordinary local people proposed that the Government should abolish all discretionary and hidden costs under the current USE programme. The EEC members proposed that:

At least if the young ones [at the Primary level] could pay fees, because people see that the money is small, and is payable - then the Government could pay for the students in senior school, possibly that would help. That is what people are now thinking, because when a child completes Primary 7, the parents cannot afford the thousands of shillings, levied, for secondary education and so these children just get stuck at home (Focus group, Mary- EEC Members).

With regard to technical vocational education, one Primary school graduate from the Municipality school said: 'let them make UPE payment official ... then these technical schools be exempted from fee payment, at least to guarantee universal technical education' (Focus group, Peter). According to him, it is technical education, which will eventually enable these children to acquire a skill to get them into gainful employment.

The head teacher of the city UPE school suggested that the UPE policy should be targeted to those who need it most as the current policy has treated all children and families in the same way, regardless of their ability, income or social economic circumstances:

I would like to see UPE whereby, the leaders within the localities are able to identify people who are disadvantaged and then provide for those children's education, so that such children can be able to go to good schools (Face-to-face interview).

Some parents are willing and capable of paying fees. The assumption that all Ugandan households are not able to pay for their children's education is wrong. According to the head teacher of the city school:

They should allow the parents [who are interested] to make a contribution, because if the parents are limited so much yet they are able, then it means that the whole burden has been left to the Government ... So, if they could leave the parents to play a very significant role in making sure that they sustain UPE, then we could see a better UPE than we have today (Face-to-face interview).

The SMC and PTA leaders of the village school suggested that, the new UPE should ensure that the Capitation Grant and the School Facilitation Grants are released on a timely basis:

the new UPE should ensure that the full allocation for each quarter is disbursed on time ... the money meant for March, should not be sent in August, as such delays are spoiling UPE implementation (Focus group, Meru- EEC Members).

The participants suggested that NFE should be part of the new policy to promote basic education. The deputy head teacher of the peri-urban UPE school in Soroti Municipality said:

I think (NFE) would help our children access a sustainable life and way of living in future, otherwise if we are to say we are going by formal education and moving from class to class to offices, then we are not going to achieve anything, the reason being, what we teach in class has to be practically done down there, where these children are going to live for the rest of their lives (Face-to-face interview).

The new re-named and re-launched UPE according to the ordinary local people needs to be designed to meet these goals, through a holistic provision of cost free education (both formal and non-formal) to give 'free' UPE meaning.

4.6.2 Create Income Generating Initiatives

Starting income generating initiatives is one way for poor parents to find cash to meet the extra costs of UPE. It is of note that subsistence farming is the backbone of the Ugandan economy. Agricultural productivity cannot therefore

be removed from any interventions in improving the household incomes for poor families considering that hunger and poverty are still major barriers to Primary education for most rural families. The documentary evidence from the World Vision (2006:91) Kamuda baseline study found that:

it is important to support agricultural production by equipping farmers with modern farming skills through training; provision of improved seeds, oxen and oxen ploughs so that farmers can produce enough food for home consumption and also for sale to earn an income.

One Primary leaver from the peri-urban Soroti Municipality UPE school suggested that: ‘the Government should provide people with animals and even garden tools to enable them to continue with agriculture, especially for the youths who have dropped out of school’ (Focus group, Pius). The SMC and PTA leaders suggested that the Government could also help with marketing their agricultural products. They said: ‘markets are a problem. People are planting sorghum or millet, but it takes time to sell; in the past they sold produce to help themselves to fight poverty, now there are problems to sell [these products]’ (Focus group, Meru).

The Government is committed to the modernisation of agriculture, which is also one of the pillars in the PEAP 2004 and NDP 2010. Ironically, the country’s PEAP strategy to fight poverty, indicates that agriculture receives only 1.6 per cent of the national budget and yet the whole PEAP is operationalised by the programme for modernisation of agriculture Nuwagaba (2007). During the fieldwork, I saw one model farm in Kamuda, but did not see any sign of transformation from subsistence farming into commercial ventures. The only existing farm located in Odina, Kamuda, closed over two decades ago because of lack of funds. Generally, most local farmers lack access to information about modern agricultural methods and technologies; as of now these local people still used rudimentary tools for farming.

The documentary evidence from the World Vision (2006:91) baseline survey for Kamuda suggests that: ‘there is a need to identify viable income generating activities that can be availed to improve people’s incomes and standards of living’. To explain this point, the head teacher of the village UPE school suggested that the local people need sensitisation about their poverty situation:

it needs sensitisation - 'what is poverty', 'what anti-poverty interventions have proved most effective to escape poverty?' Other people have poverty of money, some have poverty of what to drink, others have poverty of what to eat, others have poverty of tools and appliances, so there are different types of poverty. There are those who are poor but have large tracts of land, it is good that people are sensitised, and for us to understand each one's poverty (Face-to-face interview).

One Primary leaver from the peri-urban UPE School Municipality highlighted the link between income and non-formal education. According to him, NFE is 'on the side of education for income generating activities' (Focus group, Peter), while a Primary leaver from a city school said that Primary school drop-outs may not be able to start up a business on their own. Even when they start as apprentices, they are more likely to be exploited, or subjected to meagre pay, since they lack the knowledge (Face-to-face interview, Carol).

Finally, one Primary leaver had grander ideas about starting industries in the deprived regions as a means of generating employment and improving the economy in these areas. During the fieldwork, negotiations between the central Government and the district were ongoing for the creation of an industrial park, within Soroti municipality. This Primary leaver was of the view that:

To reduce poverty here, Government can help us by establishing some industries which can employ people and allow some young people who have tried to acquire education but they have failed [to get into gainful employment] (Focus group, Ali).

A combination of self-help initiatives, income generating activities and industrial development can stimulate the improvement of the income and standards of living for the poor people living in the remote rural and peri-rural areas, and urban city slums and the regionally deprived districts and regions. This problem of poverty requires a holistic response which could be achieved by adopting some of the above strategies.

4.6.3 Policies and Practice Informed by Research

The future policies according to participants should be informed not only by clearly conceptualised research and deliberation, but good implementation strategies. This is especially pertinent for a poor country where poverty has undermined the implementation of the education policies. For example, the head teacher of the village Primary school said it is important to carry out studies to find out why pupils are failing, dropping out or not completing UPE, and then design implementation strategies accordingly. He asked a rhetorical question: If only the Government could come up with strategies to follow these drop-outs, and to understand the problem they faced that forced them to stop schooling? This would help a great deal. He added that: 'If they help these people, then ways of alleviating poverty would be discovered, because it is those that drop out of school that increase poverty' (Face-to-face interview). Similarly, the head teacher of the city Primary school suggested that some statements made by politicians may impact negatively on the basic principles of teaching and learning. For example the issue of school uniform is taken for granted. He observed that:

Sometimes you hear the President even saying that the children should not be made to wear uniform, and yet the purpose of having children in uniform is to make them look the same and teach them how to take care of that uniform ... and be equal ... if they come, one in trousers, another wearing shorts, one has shoes, the other one doesn't ... you cannot teach them the same way of taking care of themselves (Face-to-face interview).

Paradoxically, my findings indicate that those poor children who cannot afford uniform are also most unlikely to own decent clothing. The participatory techniques with Primary school leavers in Kamuda, revealed that such poor children are ashamed of going to school in rags while their peers are dressed up in well pressed and smart uniforms (Focus group, Isaac and Dinnah). Therefore, the assumption up to now that simply telling children to go to school without uniform would enable extremely poor children to enter school is misleading.

The new thematic curriculum introduced to teach children in their mother tongue as the language of instruction in the lower grades is another policy with good intentions. The advantages of teaching in mother tongue are well documented (UNESCO 1953; in Fishman 1968; Save the Children 2009). However, the application of this policy in Uganda is bound to entrench inequality and marginalisation of minorities. With the introduction of the thematic curriculum, dominant languages are now used, in the urban and some city schools, in multilingual classrooms. Language Boards were empowered to approve the languages to use for teaching and learning in the districts. However, the partiality of the District Language Boards is yet to be felt, given that these boards are responsible for deciding the language of instruction in schools, and so far it is the dominant languages that have been endorsed.

In a focus group with UPE graduates from Kamuda, they said they feel excluded due to the societal prejudices towards minority language speakers. As will be discussed in subsequent Chapters and throughout this thesis, further research is needed to investigate the effects of the thematic curriculum policy approach in providing education in a plural and multi-ethnic society such as Uganda.

4.6.4 Encourage Community Participation

Community participation was identified as key in any attempt to increase schooling of children from poorer families. The SMC and PTA members said that they felt alienated by the Government in the implementation of the UPE policy as their role was diminished with the introduction of this policy. In a focus group with these leaders, they said:

the Government just dictates in some matters. There are some things that I do not need, as a poor person, I know my pressing priorities, but I will always be compelled to get what I do not want, perhaps even when I already have that item (Focus group - Kamuda, Meru).

The findings suggested that, although the school governing bodies like PTAs and SMCs, were empowered through the UPE policy, these entities felt that they have little to contribute to the programme managed by the state. The World Vision (2006:90) baseline study of Kamuda concluded that: ‘Communities need to

be directly involved in participation at all levels of the programme starting with assessment, designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation among others such that a sense of ownership and sustainability is created'. The SACMEQ II study asked head teachers what the contribution of the local community was to the school? Table 4.15 provides the summary tabulation of the findings:

Table 4.15. Parent/Local community contributions to the school

Type of contribution	Pupils in school with community contributing to	
	%	SE
Building of school facilities	79.4	3.44
Maintenance of school facilities	70.7	3.99
Construction/maintenance and repair of furniture/ equipment	41.6	4.38
The purchase of textbooks	13.1	2.91
The purchase of stationery	14.9	3.19
The purchase of other school supplies	17.3	3.39
Payment of examination fees	14.6	3.13
Payment of the salaries of additional teachers	17.6	3.28
Payment of an additional amount of the salary of teachers	9.0	2.45
Payment of the salaries of non-teaching staff	28.9	4.05
Payment of an additional amount of the salary of non-teaching staff	8.2	2.41
Extra-curricular activities	27.9	4.02
Assisting teachers in teaching without pay	32.8	4.10
Provision of school meals	41.7	4.14

Source: SACMEQ II (2005:136)

The Table 4.15 indicates that over 70 per cent of students were in schools where it was the parents and communities who had contributed to the building and maintenance of school facilities. The table also reveals that 28.9 per cent of communities provided payment for non-teaching staff. Therefore in their view the UPE policy is not necessarily free of cost.

Community participation is one of the key recommendations for action in the Ministry's' 2004/5 Education Sector Review. This report observed that: '[t]here should be greater promotion of local community participation in educational activities so as to strengthen partnership, ownership, accountability, efficiency and sensitivity to local challenges' (MoES 2005).

The head teacher of the village UPE School suggested that the Ministry of Education and Sports could come up with more realistic plans if they used local information:

In regard to alleviating poverty, it needs working together in a participatory manner, while giving them a plan for the future ... Take UPE as an example, it has helped people from the poverty of paying fees, but you find that these children return to the village and remain in their usual poverty ... they have no opportunity, there is no way forward, they just end up with nothing (Face-to-face interview).

Partnering with communities is not only vital in the provision of services and oversight, but according to the School Management Committees manual developed for the SMCs (MoES 2009) it can help to better focus projects to the communities priorities. Although, accused of excesses, increased community participation in the past ensured efficient use of resources, and better learning outcomes. The SMCs and PTAs need to be empowered to improve the quality and relevance of education, which has been affected by the UPE policy.

4.6.5 Ensure a Conducive Teaching-learning Environment

The field data indicated that the teaching and learning environment in the rural areas was inferior to that in the peri-urban and the urban areas, due to the sub-standard facilities, large teacher-pupil ratios, poor quality teaching by under

motivated and uninterested teachers among others. These challenges are most poignant in the wider North, due to the impact of the armed conflict on education and infrastructure such as schools and teaching resources destroyed through looting and mass displacement. Teachers are not attracted to teach in these remote districts due to lack of social amenities (Higgins 2009). These barriers are not unique to the wider North, however, the data indicate that this region is the most affected.

The participatory approaches and the secondary data sources provided insights on how the teaching and learning environment could be improved. The MoES (2007) Education Sector Review for instance observed that, the recruitment of more teachers, the provision of a meal, joint assessments of pupils between teachers and parents, timely payment of teachers' salaries and provision of scholastic materials can result in a conducive teaching-learning environment for pupils and teachers. Similarly, the interviews revealed some interesting insights. A Primary school leaver from the village suggested that providing *school meals* would 'enable every child to enter and remain in school until they completed the Primary cycle':

there are some children, who stay far away from school; they cannot go home for meals during the lunch break, they just remain in school until school closes late afternoon. When I was a student, I would not return home for the lunch break at 1:00pm. I just remained at school hungry (Face-to-face interview, Scovia).

The distance between her home and the school was the barrier. It was not possible for her to make the daily commute and return in time for afternoon classes. A similar problem affected teachers, in terms of the distance from home to school. The focus groups with the SMC and PTA leaders in Kamuda suggested that *teachers' houses* should be built near the school premises so that the teachers can stay within the school vicinity. In this way the problem of absenteeism would be addressed. Besides teachers' houses, the PTA and SMC leaders, said that the lack classrooms, latrines and instructional materials, were impediments to a conducive teaching-learning environment with significant impacts on learning outcomes in general, and for the Primary school leavers at the end of the seven-year Primary school cycle, in particular. They said:

the Government should increase the number of teachers in all schools so as to give UPE meaning, but if the focus is on access and packing children in school, without increasing teacher numbers, they are only overburdening teachers, as well as making these children to learn nothing (Focus group, Meru).

The SACMEQ II (2005) survey interrogated the subject teachers on the most important factors that influence their performance. The data provides some useful data insights that Kasirye for instance uses to extrapolate what makes the teaching-learning environment conducive in Ugandan Primary schools in terms of what motivates teachers.

Table 4.16 indicates the aggregate responses by spatial location - rural and urban. Remunerations stand out as the most important factor at 48 per cent and 43 per cent respectively for urban and rural school teachers. Besides the remuneration, the ranking factors differ considerably between the rural and urban teachers. The SACMEQ II data indicate that the second and third most important factors of success for urban teachers are the timely payment of salaries and ensuring that the pupils are learning. The rural teachers on the other hand cited opportunities for professional development (in-service training) and availability of school supplies. Thus, the urban and the rural teachers appear to have different constraints in the classroom, all which call for different interventions, to make the teaching-learning environment conducive to attract and retain qualified teachers especially in the rural areas and the regionally deprived and disadvantaged districts.

Table 4.16. What motivates teachers

	Most		Second		Third	
	Urban	Rural	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Level of Teacher salary	48.2	43	1.1	21.4	7.6	10.3
Seeing pupil's learn	19.3	7.3	8.9	5.9	11.1	12.2
Opportunities for professional development	0.5	12.2	9.4	3.6	2.1	11.4
Availability of classroom supplies	0.2	9.7	8	9.1	25.9	17.2
School location	4.3	7.8	-	0.2	25.4	0.1
Timely salary payment	19.8	2.6	29.7	21	5	5.5
Quality of school buildings	-	7.3	3.4	8.2	1.1	7.2
Quality of school management	2.3	4.5	5.6	10.4	8.1	3.4
Other factors*	5.4	5.6	33.9	20.2	13.7	32.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Kasirye (2009:20) from the SACMEQ II data

Other factors* include: distance to school; availability of teacher housing; quality of teacher housing; availability of classroom furniture; amicable relations with staff; good relations with local community; and opportunities for promotion.

The communities also had ideas about how they wanted to see the teaching learning process made conducive and child friendly. The SMC and PTA members said: ‘we want UPE where there are 40 children in a class rather than the *overcrowded* classes of 180 pupils with only one teacher’ (Focus group, Awis). Further, one member said:

I want to add that, for children, it’s good to have a library in the school, where children can do their private reading. There are many textbooks in the school, but there is no place to put these textbooks. The new UPE could consider this idea and that would be very helpful. If we convert one class into a library where there are few classrooms, which class would you turn into a library? (Focus group).

Likewise, the findings of the SACMEQ II study (2005) identified a library as an important element to UPE, where material resources could be placed. Besides the aforementioned, Table 4.16 indicates that there a number of other issues which impinge on the teacher motivation, including teacher-pupil and, pupil-classroom ratios, school buildings, and the quality of the school management. In all, the absence of a conducive teaching and learning environment impacted negatively on learning outcomes for disadvantaged children and youths. Improving these conditions, among others, could improve the situation of the poor, deprived communities.

Summary of the Design of UPE, NFE and Poverty Initiatives to Reduce Inequalities

The participants suggested different approaches to the design of UPE, NFE and poverty initiatives in order to provide a conducive teaching-learning environment. They proposed the renaming and re-launching of UPE so that no child is excluded no matter how poor. The proposal to start self-help groups for income generating initiatives, and to think through the design for better wellbeing, and that future policies and practice need to be informed by research, rather than, for political expediency is the way to go. In determining how to design the formal and non-formal education and the poverty initiatives meaningfully, a starting point to consider would be to ask why the poverty and educational inequalities exist in the first place. We need to ask whether UPE is

the best approach, if so, why is there widespread disillusionment with the UPE policy? Is the poor quality of formal education especially in the villages by design or by default - or is it due to a cultural and resources gap between school and the community? The aspirations of the local people can be realised if their views are considered and they are empowered to take control of their lives by involving them in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating this policy, so as to install a sense of ownership and sustainability of the Government's UPE policy initiative.

4.7 Summary of the Findings

This Chapter summarised the data that emerged from the one-year fieldwork in Uganda. The Chapter also made reference to the findings of the SACMEQ II, Survey II (2005) which undertook the first study on the condition of schooling and quality in Uganda as part of the SACMEQ consortium. These findings illustrate how critical ethnography and social constructionist and emancipatory paradigms, as well as the SACMEQ II data, were well suited to investigate the relationship between the 1997 Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy and the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda, drawing on evidence from the decade (1997-2007). I collected descriptive material and acquired insights into the interplay of the dominant social constructions of the research problem. The SACMEQ II data was used to maximise the validity of this study. Arguably, the different approaches ensure that a more detailed picture emerges within which the generalisability of each research question and the categories can be attempted and the impacts on policy on poor people analysed. Briefly, I recapitulate the findings as follows:

The findings of the first question on the *state* of regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda, a decade since the launch of the 1997 UPE policy, suggested that although there were improvements in enrolments, the inequality in participation and learning outcomes between the more affluent Southern regions and the poorer Northern regions persisted. Likewise, the rural/urban, gender, socio-economic and inequalities based on ethnic origin have persisted in the decade, 1997-2007, of implementation of the UPE policy. These disparities are as a result of the socio-economic and political context in which schools in the different regions and the locations are situated.

The second question on the *perceptions* of UPE and its effects on reducing poverty and educational inequalities revealed that there is a difference between the perceptions of the powerful bureaucrats and people in power, and the less powerful ordinary and local people. The claims that rural schools benefited most, may thus be far-fetched and need to be re-evaluated, since it is the poorest groups - for example, girls, ethnolinguistic minorities and those with disability or living in the geographically marginalised regions who face numerous obstacles to access free UPE or complete the primary cycle with good learning outcomes or progress to post-primary opportunities due to the complex and multiple sources of disadvantage. The differences in perceptions need to be taken into account in order to help develop and shape educational reforms.

The third question on the *evidence* whether UPE and NFE has helped poor people to escape from poverty revealed that the official data are selective with the tendency to emphasise enrolment, which is, undoubtedly, a remarkable achievement under UPE, while underemphasising quality, the high attrition, and inequalities such as the regional disparities. Also, non-formal education, adult education and lifelong learning which are not 'vote catchers' are neglected. This indifference has disenfranchised out-of-school children, young people and illiterate adults as less attention and resources are directed to them, thus perpetuating their marginalisation and disadvantage.

The fourth question reveals that UPE and NFE have been *socially constructed* to give credit to the Government for what has gone right, while what has gone wrong has been socially constructed to heap the blame on poor parents who were labelled 'saboteurs' or 'errant' (Mugerwa *et al.*, 2008). The poor parents were branded as having negative attitudes towards education such that the problem is not the UPE policy, but rather the irresponsibility and negative attitudes of the poor parents and pupils towards education. These dominant social constructions have been internalised and are now taken for granted as gospel truths.

The fifth question of how UPE can be meaningfully *designed* to help reduce regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda provided some fresh insights about the desirable changes that the local people want to see occur. They proposed the re-naming and re-launching of UPE to give it new meaning,

starting self-help and income generating initiatives, introducing fair policies informed by research, encouraging community participation and providing a conducive teaching-learning environment.

The writing and discussion of the findings in this Chapter has undoubtedly been an important part of the journey of explanation, influenced by the integrated theoretical approach that shaped the data collection methods. A study of poor people, as described here, can present conceptual challenges. Chambers (2000:163) argues that: 'Self-critical analysis, sensitive rapport and participatory methods can contribute some valid insight into the lives, values, priorities and preferences of poor people'.

Therefore, this account took note of the voice of the participants and the researcher, beginning from the basic assumption that 'contemporary societies have systematic inequalities completely maintained and reproduced by culture' (Carspecken 2001:4). Since the study is explicitly emancipatory in approach and methodology, these concepts led me to examine the domination, exploitation and the unequal power relations, and intersecting geographical inequalities, and I began to consider the implications of the 1997 UPE policy for the elimination of the regional disparities and inequalities. I became aware of the real effect of this policy especially on the extremely impoverished people and vulnerable children and low-income households. As one participant put it: 'UPE has not decreased poverty; instead it has increased it'. This observation must be carefully scrutinised. In all, these findings provided new empirically and theoretically informed data to illuminate the resilient inequalities. Some of these claims were validated, while others are contradicted by the SACMEQ II Study which was used to validate the findings from the fieldwork.

In the next Chapter, these contradictions and conflicting perceptions will be further analysed for their merits and demerits. The key codes and the sub codes presented here will be grouped together into themes in an elaborate process to further analyse these issues for a simple reason: high quality knowledge, which is robust in analysis, could help guide the reforms to eliminate disparities and inequalities in the education system. This is presented next.

5 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The analytic approach employed herein suggests the need for specific strategies aimed at specific regional problems rather than the general sort of policies derived from theories in the abstract (Keith Ede, 1981:302).

5.1 Introduction

The analytical task of interpreting and making sense out of the field data was daunting, owing to the epistemological and technical challenges which are at the heart of critical ethnography. Moreover, identifying the ‘central issue’ in social constructionist and emancipatory research is by no means without its challenges. In my analysis, I state that this task was not one interpretive effort. Pole and Morrison (2003:74) citing Becker (1996) and Burgess (1984) observe that:

Research literature confirms that analysis is not a distinct phase but occurs simultaneously and continuously as a key aspect of the research design and process.

The analysis was therefore broken down into processes and themes. I refer to ‘themes’, in this investigation, as some concept or theory that emerges from the data, that is, ‘some signal trend, some *master* conception, or key distinction’ (Mills 1959; quoted by Bogdan and Biklen 1992:186). Each one of the five themes was assigned a cluster or sub-codes that best represented the data to the different codes and categories as is presented in Table 5.1. These codes are derived from the data of findings presented in Chapter 4 and analysed manually, and from the interview transcripts and field notes by subjecting them to numerous readings until different themes or key distinctions emerged.

In my analysis, I have integrated critical ethnography, social constructionist and emancipatory paradigms as the approaches to addressing inequality in society. As outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, I state that: ‘critical ethnography is influenced by many things, some are influenced by the implicit theory of *praxis*, others by meaningful action, and these are significant to both the epistemological and

data-analytic issues' (Carspecken 2001:5). With respect to the social constructionist approaches, Burr (1995:3) argues that: '[s]ocial constructionism insists that we take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world (including our selves)' by challenging the conventional everyday knowledge. The emancipatory paradigms, on the other hand, according to Mertens (1998) cited by Chilisa and Preece (2005: 33): 'are influenced by various philosophies and theories with the common theme of transforming communities through group action' so as to help to empower those groups that are marginalised in society. If the dominant values are social justice then emancipatory approaches can have a positive impact.

I adopted the hermeneutic-reconstructive analysis, within this overall integrated approach - the method used to articulate the themes of a cultural sharing group (Carspecken 2001:11). The five major themes identified through these rigorous approaches are: regional inequalities, powerlessness, (mis)management of resources, enduring faith in education and changes that need to occur, are not distinct as there are some overlaps in relation to the central research problem of inequity and inequality that is common to virtually every theme. The analysis of these themes is grounded in a high quality knowledge base on education reforms with the practical evidence generated from the fieldwork and other education systems around the world. The analytical work will help to answer the questions: why significant disparities remain predominantly among the children from the poorest households in the rural and remote areas, particularly in the North and North-Eastern Uganda despite UPE. The ultimate objective of this rigorous analytic approach is to uncover the shortcomings of this policy, and propose strategies and interventions that will help guide reforms for a fair and inclusive system.

The analysis of the robust data and the fieldwork evidence presented in the previous Chapter 4 is given next.

Table 5.1. The key codes/categories of findings and assignment of themes

Codes/Categories	Key themes
Inequalities Persisting Hunger as a Barrier to Schooling Parents' Education Level	Regional inequalities
The Concept of 'Free' UPE Policy The Diverse Perspectives of Non-Formal Education Extreme Poverty	Powerlessness
Corruption Bad Administration Mismanagement of Resources Dysfunctional Systems	(Mis) Management of resources
Valuing Education Attitudes Responsibility	Enduring faith in education
Re-name and Re-launch UPE Start income Generating Initiatives Policies and Practice Informed by Research Encourage Community Participation Ensure a Conducive Teaching-learning Environment	Changes that need to occur

Source: Summary of codes and sub-codes of the different categories formed to contribute to the themes identified by the researcher.

5.2 Regional Inequalities

regional inequalities often coincide with ethnic divisions such as those in sub Saharan Africa (Foster 1980:26).

Inequality in Uganda is evident and entrenched through various forms, such as the regional, rural versus urban, gender and the subtle inequalities based on

ethnic and cultural background. The 1997 UPE policy was designed to address this concern; however, the findings from the fieldwork provided mixed signals. In this section, I analyse the data emerging from the fieldwork, which forms the building blocks for the core themes running throughout this thesis.

First, is inequality. The national level statistics from the Ministry of Education and Sports indicate that: '[o]f the 2,159,850 children who enrolled in primary 1 in 1997, only 462,000 (22 per cent) registered to sit for the final exam in primary 7' (MoES 2003 cited by Higgins and Rwanyange 2005:14). The average Primary school completion rate for the North was 1.3 per cent, compared to the 22 per cent national average of the pioneer UPE students of 1997 (UNICEF 2006a). The Uganda UNDP HDR (2007:56) study observes that:

The low level of [human development index] HDI in the Northern and Eastern regions is attributed to the insurgency that forced people to relocate to safe areas with fewer opportunities to participate in economically productive activities.

Witter and Bukokhe's (2004:648) study from children's' perspectives in Uganda observed that children attributed poverty to 'living in a war-affected area', including 'being displaced and abducted'. Similarly, studies by Simon Appleton (2003, 2009) arrived at the same conclusion that while the Southern (Central and Western) regions flourished in the period of economic growth, the Northern (North and East) regions lagged behind.

This crucial finding by Heyneman in the study on Uganda, titled '*A Coleman Report from a Non-industrialised Society*', published thirty-three years ago, is rendered invalid if we consider the socio-political changes that have happened since publication of this study, and the launching of UPE in 1997. Heyneman (1980:132) arrived at the following conclusion:

the highest performing ethnic groups are those most isolated from urban centres; those furthest away from centres of industrialisation, capital-intensive agriculture, Government administration; and those who are independent of traditional authority or early missionary activity.

The national trends and the scores in the primary leaving examinations (from the past decade) indicate that the worst performing districts today are in the remote, peripheral and deprived regions, particularly those in the North and North-East, furthest from the industrial hub of Central Uganda. If the people from the North have benefitted a little from the learning outcomes from the UPE policy, the people in the North-East benefitted less.

The *rural/urban inequalities* are another category to explain the regional disparities under UPE in Uganda. This phenomenon is a key feature in many developing countries where schools in rural areas are more disadvantaged than urban ones in terms of facilities, scholastic materials and other training materials. A UNESCO (2008:78) study noted that:

In many countries, living in a rural area carries a marked handicap in terms of opportunities for education. Rural children are less likely to attend school, and are more likely to drop out, than their urban counterparts.

Most of the out-of-school children and youths come from the poorest households and live in the rural areas. An IMF study (2006) cited by the UNESCO (2008:78) Report argues that: 'Poverty provides part of the explanation: some two-thirds of the rural population live in poverty, compared to around half of urban households'. This observation corroborates our findings in Uganda. A Primary school leaver from a city school said that: 'when looking at UPE, Kampala is always going to be the best, then Wakiso, those are the districts [all in Central Uganda] that are always going to be on top' (Face-to-face interview). Since the launching of the UPE, children from Central Uganda and from the West are twice as likely to be in school as their counterparts in the rural areas, especially in the North and North-East, and to score better grades, as the former have been engulfed in conflict and insecurity, while in the other areas, prosperity and growth has prevailed (Appleton 2003, 2009; UNDP HDR 2007; World Bank 2008).

With respect to *inequalities between male and female*, the national level data indicate that gender inequalities were closing, yet field data and analysis suggested that regional differences were more dramatic in the past decade (1997-2007) of UPE implementation, especially for the disadvantaged and

marginalised in the wider North (Mukwaya *et al.*, 2008). The deputy headmistress of the Municipality Primary school in Soroti confirmed this reality. She observed that, 'according to our statistics', very many girls start at lower primary but few complete the primary cycle. In contrast, the head teacher of the urban city UPE School was unequivocal, saying he has never witnessed a girl dropping out for marriage in his school. What he has experienced is 'transfers', when children leave, say in P3 or P4, to join boarding schools. It is alarming that it is among the poor, living in the deprived and marginalised areas, that the cases of early marriages and teenage pregnancies are rampant, with most girls abandoning school when they reach puberty. Witter and Bukokhe (2004:651) corroborated these findings in their study in Uganda which concluded that:

poor girls are viewed as unworthy of education because they will get married and their husbands will benefit from their schooling rather than their parents or guardians.

The national statistics may signal gender parity. '[g]irls now constitute 49.8 per cent of total enrolment' (Mbabazi 2008:5). However, the key question of whether this parity is uniformly spread across all regions and locations in the country is neglected. Tomasevski (2006a) observes that education is supposed to make girls marry later, it therefore fails them, when it is much too short to make a difference. In my analysis, local people had not heard about the Government initiatives for girls, as outlined. On the contrary, the field data suggested that the girls in villages and rural areas were still more likely to be forced out of school because of economic and societal pressures. The gendered social construction of poverty suggests that girls do not deserve a quality education as they are merely means of procreation or even pleasure. The national statistics can thus be misleading and are an inaccurate measure of gender parity from the equity perspective. Chilisa and Preece (2005) argue that powerful people determine dominant discourses. If this dominant construction of gender parity is taken for granted as the 'official' information, then girls in the poor, remote and disadvantaged areas will continue to be marginalised as they disappear as a priority concern thus perpetuating social exclusion and entrenching education inequalities.

Second, is *hunger*, which is another category to explain the regional poverty and educational inequalities. The Education Act (2008:56) spells out that:

The taking of mid-day meals at school and the payment for such meals shall be voluntary and no pupil who has opted not to pay for or take mid-day meals at school shall be excluded from school for non-payment for such meals.

The Education Act does not guarantee the provision of a meal at school for all children. What is obvious and collaborated by the field data is that the children who have not paid are excluded from having school meals. Therefore, while the 1997 UPE policy put in extra numbers of children in school, a significant number of the poor children turn up hungry and struggle to concentrate, before returning home for their one meal of the day, if they were lucky enough. Defaulting pupils do not pay for or take a mid-day meal, because they simply cannot afford it. It is these children who are likely to repeat, do poorly or drop out of school altogether. Hunger is thus a major cause of educational inequalities. My field work concluded that hunger in Uganda may have taken on a regional dimension, with the affluent Southern regions having a better climate doing better in terms of food security, on the one hand, and the poor semi-arid areas in the North and North-East, doing poorly, owing to the climatic differences across the four regions. Mukwaya *et al.*, (2008:4) also note that:

Pre-existing inequalities between the more affluent central crescent area around Lake Victoria and the drier, more disadvantaged northern part of the country have been exacerbated by the war situation that has ravaged the northern region over the last twenty years, coupled with the cattle rustling problem that has traditionally plagued Karamoja and the surrounding sub-region.

A case in point is the IDP mother described in Chapter 4, Section 4.1.3, whom I found in a Municipality school garden, with her two sons digging at the request of a Primary school teacher as lessons were going on a few yards away. It is as if this woman's children and their needs are invisible within the discourse of UPE. Therefore, the statement by the Minister of Education and Sports: 'that rather than miss class, the pupils should go hungry' (Ahimbisibwe 2007:12) does not

reflect the painful reality of hunger which was identified as a major cause of absenteeism and eventual drop-out of children in UPE schools.

Third, is the **parents' level of education**, another key factor that, determines inequalities in Uganda. Research has revealed that students' performance depends on school quality. Likewise, parental education and preferences demonstrate a consensus that more educated parents are likely to send their children to higher quality schools (See, for example, Case and Deaton, 1999; Glewwe and Jacoby 1994; and Kasirye 2009). Further, parental income has an influence on students' performance with children from well-to-do families being positively correlated with higher test scores (Hanushek, 2003; Kasirye, 2009). These empirical arguments can help us to better understand the findings of this fieldwork, presented in Chapter 4 section 4.2.3 which explain the differences in students performance due to the difference in the levels of the parents' educational attainment, between and within the different regions, between and within rural and urban areas and between fathers and mothers.

Evidence reveals that literacy is positively correlated to the social economic status (Street 1995; Holme 2004). The increasing role of literacy and numeracy in the realities of today's life, means that the social inequalities in the country have widened, linked to the levels of regional disparities. The UNESCO (2010:6) study notes that: 'poor quality of education in childhood is reflected by illiteracy among adults who spent several years in school'. The regional imbalances are singled out in the 1992 White Paper which observed that the inequalities are intergenerational starting with parents and continue with their children. Politically, regional differences in the education levels constitute a major concern for many countries in Latin America, Africa and other emerging democracies (Teese and Lamb 2007). To inculcate social cohesion, on one hand, the political elites look to the educational system as an institution for the integration of the young into a national culture. A delay in the development of education is interpreted by regional communities as a sign of lack of interest by the national Government. These imbalances can contribute to regional aspirations and threaten national unity.

Regional inequalities, in the final analysis, are a key feature in Uganda's education system and other spheres of life. Studies in inequalities can offer

scope for understanding why educational policies are not closing the persistent inequalities, entrenched by the hierarchies of knowledge and power, and provide alternative ways of how to lower these disparities.

5.3 Powerlessness

This combination of limited assets and voice results in poor people feeling powerless to defend themselves and their families (Narayan, *et al.*, 2000:268).

Powerlessness was the second theme that emerged from the rigorous qualitative data analysis of the findings. I shall present the three sub-themes (categories) emerging from the data that are used to illustrate this theme namely: the concept of 'free' UPE policy; the diverse perspectives of non-formal education; and, extreme poverty.

I start by examining the *meaning of the 'free' UPE policy*. Powerful people used various means to obscure the meaning of UPE in Uganda. One popular technique that was perfected was the rewording of what was promised, in a series of turns since its launch in 1997. First the President said that UPE would be provided to four children, and then it was extended to all children, since implementation of a four child per family policy was impracticable owing to the nature of families in the Uganda context which are extended or polygamous rather than nuclear (MoES 1999b; Eilor 2005). A more clear-cut meaning of UPE appeared in the Education Act (2008:9) after a decade of reforms. It is given as follows:

“UPE” means the State funded universal primary education programme where tuition fees are paid by Government where the principle of equitable access to conducive, quality, relevant and affordable education is emphasised for all children of all sexes, categories and in special circumstances.

The Education Act (2008:5) clarified further that free compulsory primary education entails costs. It stated that:

There shall be no fees collection for building classrooms, teachers' houses, latrines, uniforms, buying text books, furniture, test or examinations, but, a school in the area of jurisdiction of an urban council may levy a charge for administrative and utility expenses not exceeding 10,400/= per school year, or as may be prescribed from time to time and, subject to this regulations, any school may levy a charge for mid-day meals as determined by the management committee in consultation with the district council¹².

The Education Act is clear that besides non-tuition costs met by parents (uniform, examinations, exercise books etc) schools may charge for utility expenses or for meals. The Education Act reinforces and reconfirms the perception of ordinary people that UPE is not cost free. The World Vision (2006) assessment in Kamuda observed that the concept of UPE was misunderstood by the local people. However, this analytical work and practical evidence from the fieldwork suggests that this argument is flawed. Rather, politicians with their advisers and agents, misused the concept of UPE through argument to distort its true meaning. Faced with adamant Parents who demanded to know why UPE schools were asking parents for contributions, and the urgent need to keep schools running, administrators at the school level were left with the task of interpreting and clarifying to the parents what accessing UPE actually entails. The Deputy headmistress of a Soroti Municipality school expressed her dilemma, saying: 'we try to discuss with parents, we tell them, you know, it is not free' and that parents are 'only misunderstanding'. By keeping the meaning of UPE vague, during the initial years of its launch in 1997, and the subsequent years of implementation of this policy, policymakers, and technocrats had the lee-way to blame local people for misunderstanding the Government's concept of 'free' UPE and for what went wrong.

Chilisa and Preece (2005) argue that meaning is determined by those who hold power. The interpretation and perception of these poor people of 'free' UPE was rendered invalid by those in power who retracted what was inconvenient and systematically distorted this policy for political expediency. In the Nordic model, education is a free public service. Tomasevski (2006b:xi) argues that: 'If the Nordic model pertains to the best practices, the global pledges to universalize primary education are a prototype of a 'worst practice' because so far they have

all been broken'. In the same vein, Uganda's UPE policy did not deliver a cost-free education because as the findings revealed, there are school levies under UPE, which are sanctioned by the Government. These non-tuition costs are a barrier to the poor households. Tomasevski, (2006b:xi) argued that:

Education should be universalised so as to encompass all children. To ensure that this is so, education should also be compulsory. To be compulsory, it has to be free.

The conclusion here is that contrary to the statements by politicians and technocrats, UPE is not free because it entails costs, some of which, are prohibitive for poor families. In this thesis, the affected children are the vulnerable girls, those with disabilities living in the remote, rural and deprived regions and areas.

Non-formal education is the second sub-theme that explains powerlessness. In Chapter 1, section 1.4.2 on the discussion of non-formal education role in the eradication of poverty and inequality, we observed that there are still many children in Uganda who cannot access formal education, let alone non-formal education opportunities. I cited Nakabugo and Lockheed *et al.*, (1991) (cited in Nakabugo *et al.*, 2008), who argued that families value the labour of their children and the income that accrues from it, rather than on formal schooling or the perceived low market returns on education. Therefore, with few exceptions, the type (whether formal or non-formal) and the duration of education (from early childhood to tertiary education or adult education) is a major determinant of who can join the elite status in Uganda. Chambers (2000) provides a typology to differentiate between powerful and less powerful people by the different characteristics between the lower and higher professional status as indicated in Table 5.2, based on how long (prolonged or brief) one has spent in formal schooling.

Table 5.2. Contrasting correlates of higher and lower professional status

Characteristics	High status	Low status
Education, training and induction	Prolonged	Brief
Competence	Specialist	Generalist
Influence	Powerful	Weak
Income, wealth	Higher	Lower
Location	Central, urban	Peripheral, rural

Note: these are general tendencies not absolutes (adapted from Chambers, 2000:35).

Children, young people and adults who are unable to join formal school, or drop out before completing the primary cycle or attaining qualifications in post-primary and tertiary institutions are not able to compete for positions or opportunities in the public and private sectors of the economy in the neo-liberal era where formal qualifications are the route to salaried employment. For example, it is a requirement for any citizen aspiring to join public or political office in Uganda to have minimum formal qualifications (with certification as proof of eligibility). As a result, people view formal education as the only worthwhile route. Even Primary leavers in the villages held the view that: 'UPE is more important than non-formal education because UPE makes somebody to be respected in future' (Focus group, Pius). School drop-outs, who fail to move to the next grade, or fail in the terminal examinations at the end of Primary schooling, are doubly disadvantaged and frustrated by a rigid formal education system, and the non availability of more flexible non-formal education opportunities.

It is worth noting that the most powerful people (policy makers, educators, technocrats, politicians etc) are products of the formal school system and perpetuate their hegemony as they are responsible for setting the education agenda. Farrell and Hartwell (2008:15) citing Davies (1996) observe that:

Many who argue from a critical theory perspective claim that these forms remain in place because they were designed, and continue, to serve the interests of those who already hold positions of power in

society - to change them significantly would be to threaten those relations of power and influence.

It is not far-fetched to argue that it is inconceivable that NFE will be prioritised over formal education (Farell and Hartwell 2008), considering that even public UPE schools supported by Government lack sufficient teachers, scholastic materials and texts books. Although the benefits of non-formal education are increasingly recognised, it is naïve to suggest that NFE can replace UPE in view of the traditional Governments' focus on supporting formal programmes. This conventional or formal way of schooling has set the patterns and habits that seem set to continue in the future, thus perpetuating exclusion, and therefore entrenching powerlessness for the disadvantaged groups and regions, who for one reason or another are not in school (e.g. income poverty, gender and other sources of disadvantages). Children who attain poor learning outcomes, or drop-out before completing school are doubly disadvantaged. 'Evidence also shows that youth who drop out of school early are more vulnerable to unemployment, poverty, teen marriage, pregnancy, and delinquency...' (World Bank 2011:58). These youths are likely to remain at the periphery and will be unable to influence politics in their favour for their emancipation, considering that they lack education which is viewed as a key leveller of opportunity.

Extreme poverty is the third category to explain the theme of powerlessness. Poverty has been associated with the term powerlessness as poverty is now recognised as a multidimensional problem, encompassing, a number of issues such as a lack of food, shelter, clothing, income, information, voice, isolation, capability, participation, shame, social exclusion, insecurity, helplessness and neglect, all of which are associated with lack of power (UNDP 2002; Kiirya 2003; Preece 2006). Shaeffer (2010:4-5) observes that:

The poor (especially those in what is usually called "extreme poverty") are both rural and, following internal migration patterns, increasingly urban. They live on less than \$1 a day, are landless and unemployed or work as day labourers and small vendors, and have little access to adequate social services.

The Uganda Household Survey (UBOS 2006) indicated that the number of Ugandans living in extreme poverty was nine million, with the North and North-East Uganda trailing the South West and Central regions in all the poverty indicators owing to over two decades of civil war, insecurity and cattle raids, in the 1980s', 1990's and into the 21st Century when people lost property, schools were vandalised, infrastructure devastated and most families left destitute (See Appendix VII for the trends in poverty across the different regions of Uganda). This situation represents the concept of the multidimensionality of poverty captured by Sen (1999) which may involve 'unfreedoms', such as absence of protection from the state, which is also linked to poverty, which leads to *insecurity*. In a sense, these children, youths and adults living in extreme poverty, in these marginalised locations and regions are invisible to the education system.

Eradicating extreme poverty continues to be one of the main challenges of our time, and is a major concern of Governments, civil society organisations, private sector, and the international community. Ending extreme poverty among regions and groups in Uganda will require the combined efforts of all, in effective partnership with the Government and other development actors. As Stromquist (2007:209) notes: '[e]ducation can therefore play a double role: to reduce poverty and inequality or increase it'. Ultimately, poor children are more likely to become further marginalised by the education system if the system does not respond to the unique circumstances of these learners. Hence, this theme of powerlessness is poignant.

In summary, the research process itself illustrates this theme of powerlessness. Fitz and Halpin (1994:48) citing Hunter (1993) argue that:

Although ethnographers may argue that their research gives a "voice" to the socially disadvantaged and politically under-represented, who are in effect silenced by the system in which they are situated, it is also the case ... that their relative *powerlessness* is demonstrated by the frequency with which academics visit and record their lives ... In contrast, the powerful - in this case the administrative and political elite - have considerable constitutional, legal and cultural resources

that enable them to deflect or channel any research in which they are the object of enquiry.

Inequalities in the learning outcomes between the - gender, socio-economic status and ethnic origin entrench powerlessness, which exists in various modalities, described in this section, including frustration, exhaustion and exclusion from decision making, which succinctly represents this multidimensional and multi-faceted phenomenon of poverty and inequality which has deeply permeated and characterise our society. Recognising that poverty leads to trauma and shame (UNDP 2002; Preece 2006), explains the dire situation of the poor families, thus reinforcing the theme of powerlessness.

5.4 (Mis)management of Resources

Less equitable delivery of resources can also occur as a result of mismanagement (Heyneman, 1980:157).

The (mis)management of resources is the third theme that emerged from my analysis of the field data. This theme takes on many forms. Umoh 2003:6 described it as: ‘rampant corruption, bad administration and mismanagement of resources’. Added to this, are the dysfunctional systems which makes it a challenge to manage UPE resources. I will draw on these four mentioned categories in my analysis of this theme starting with corruption as follows:

Corruption is a source of the mismanagement of resources perpetuated by a dysfunctional system. Green (2008) writes that when poor people are asked to define poverty, they frequently cite lack of income and their helplessness to resist demands for bribes from public servants. Such corruption, he argues generates a sense of powerlessness. In our fieldwork in Kamuda Sub-County, one community leader said: ‘corruption has brought the collapse of everything in Uganda’ (Focus group, Mary). Bribery has become a way of life and corruption has ceased to be shocking to ordinary people. For example Kanyeihamba (2009:10) observes that: ‘[c]orruption in Uganda has not only become endemic but it is fully accepted as a way of life’. The field data suggested that practices such as the existence of ghost teachers and pupils, false accountability, forgery,

embezzlement, meddling in the procurement processes, shoddy construction of UPE schools and bribery among others, is widespread.

Johnson (2008:49), citing Hallak and Poisson (2007), observes that the Community Accountability and Transparency Initiative (CATI) is set against this background of the perennial problem of corruption in education in many countries in both the more-developed and less-developed world especially the leakage and wastage of public funds. Corruption prompted studies into public expenditure in over 35 countries in the developing world commissioned by the World Bank (see Table 5.3). These studies used mechanisms like the Public Expenditure Tracking Systems (PETS) or the Quantitative Service Delivery (QSDS) mechanism. These studies provided important information about the levels of public expenditure and the pilferage of resources meant for schools.

Table 5.3. Countries in which social sectors public expenditure tracking surveys have been carried out between 1996 and 2004

PETS	QSDS
Albania, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Ghana, Honduras, Macedonia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Nicaragua, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda , Yemen, Zambia	Algeria, Benin, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Chad, Colombia, Ethiopia, Honduras, Laos, Macedonia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Uganda , Zambia

Adapted from Winker (2005) in Johnson (2008:49).

Prompted by the PETS and QSDS studies in Uganda, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (1999) acknowledged that ‘widespread corruption and other departures from recognised standards of governance’ (MFPED 1999:xiv) were noted during the implementation of the UPE policy. Uganda participated in these studies to find a way to address this vice. It is worrisome that the report by Transparency International (TI) (2008) includes Uganda among the group of countries that have the highest levels of corruption. Transparency International 2008 ratings reveal Uganda’s corruption ranking dipping from position 111 to 126, from the 180 countries surveyed. Local surveys

and studies like the National Integrity Surveys, by the Inspectorate of Government, also indicate that corruption is on the rise.

Uganda was praised for the success in reducing corruption under UPE by providing more and better information. The Report, *Educating the world's children: patterns of growth and inequality*, (Wils *et al.*, 2008:62) noted that:

The use of public information to tackle corruption and mismanagement has helped ensure that over 90 per cent of the greatly increased central funding reaches schools instead of a dire 28 per cent in 1996.

The assumption that corruption had reduced and the public service delivery had improved because citizens are better informed, is misleading, since corruption continued unabated and regional disparities are persisting.

Bad administration is the next category identified in the field data as a cause of the mismanagement of resources, yet this is rarely a subject of investigation because the key senior officials are reluctant to investigate themselves or confront the mal-administration and abuse of power (Halpin 1994 citing Hunter 1993). Instead the Ministry has strenuously defended its performance arguing that: '[a]s the sector charged with the implementation of UPE, the Ministry of Education and Sports has improved donor coordination and streamlined the educational planning, monitoring and evaluation processes' (Mbabazi 2008:6). Such analyses are shallow, because they do not explain the role of bureaucrats in the wastage and leakage of funds. All efficiency indicators are directed to the 'school' rather than to the Ministry of Education and Sports structures (Mbabazi 2008:9). The World Bank commissioned studies on participatory poverty assessments (PPA) documented in Narayan (2000) argued that, poor people suffer most from bad administration. This bad administration is therefore a crucial and important factor which has undermined the UPE policy implementation in Uganda.

The *mismanagement of resources* is not a new phenomenon in Uganda. The Heyneman study of 1975 found that mismanagement appears to have happened in 1967 and 1972 in three areas of Ugandan Primary schooling, notably in,

‘school furniture, school accounts, and school textbooks’ (Heyneman 1980:157). In my analysis, the nature and scope of mismanagement of resources has changed dramatically over the past 30 years particularly in the decade (1997-2007) since the launch of UPE in 1997. The four principal sources of the (mis)management of resources according to the World Bank (2003) study in Uganda, were the existence of ‘ghost’ teachers,¹³ high rates of student, teacher and headmaster absenteeism, diversion of funds to meet other costs, and the delays by the district authorities in releasing UPE money to schools.

Besides these four areas of leakages outlined, the inflation or exaggeration of pupils’ numbers to cash in on the UPE Capitation Grant, by corrupt Government officials in collusion with head teachers, exacerbated the mismanagement of UPE resources (Muwanika 2008). The funding mechanism of the UPE policy through the School Capitation Grant (SCG) calculated per head (i.e. every pupil enrolled in school) was the major underlying cause of leakage and mismanagement of resources. The bigger the number of pupils, the higher the Capitation grant paid; thus there was the urge to falsify the numbers of pupils to increase the amount of funds misappropriated.

Another category to explain the (mis)management of resources under UPE is *failures of governance and poor accountability*. Higgins and Rwanyange (2005) observe that accountability is currently perceived by many to be to external agencies; donors and the international community which demands evidence of progress towards EFA goals. This term ‘accountability’ is in much use because of the proliferation of projects funded by donors, such as USAID, DFID, World Bank and the European Union (EFAG 2006) who massively subsidised UPE. To ensure accountability, schools in Uganda were obliged to undertake certain procedures. Johnson (2008:49), citing Reinikka and Svensson’s (2004) study in Uganda, observes that:

They also asked Primary schools to display on their notice boards and other accessible spaces, information on the inflow of funds to the school. The objective of this campaign was to promote transparency and increase public sector accountability by giving citizens access to information which allowed them to understand and examine the workings of Capitation Grants to Primary schools.

Many people believed that the existence of such checks and balances assured accountability, prompting Johnson (2008:49) to observe that: '[t]he Ugandan case is an example of a cost-effective policy that helped to demystify the process by which money was made available to local schools'. In our investigation, local people and communities are familiar with and regularly use the word 'accountability', but with scepticism, because to them, school administrators 'just forge accountability' (Focus Group, John) rendering the principle of accountability of no value, just a white wash. Muwanga (2000), cited by Dauda (2004:145), for example noted that:

A crisis in accountability quickly followed the abolition of fees and the disbanding of PTA and SMCs'. District administrations were reported to be diverting funds for UPE to other budgets without any consultation, moreover, with the abolition of fees, PTAs were forced to adopt informal ways of collecting money that easily led to rent-seeking behaviour.

The two powerful mechanisms of improving accountability in an education system and therefore efficient management of resources is transparency of information and school-based management (World Bank 2011). The field data suggest that these processes are still weak in Uganda owing to the dysfunctional system discussed next.

The *dysfunctional system*, is the last category to explain the mismanagement of resources and the challenge of reaching those who are excluded from and within the education system. Schaeffer (2010:7) citing UNESCO (2010) observes that, a study in Indonesia found that: 'poverty, combined with dysfunctional communities, dysfunctional families, and dysfunctional schools that threaten, abuse, and disable young people to the point where, they decide that the most appropriate choice in all their complex circumstances is to leave school'. In this thesis, it is clear that the state structures in many poor developing countries are dysfunctional and are unable to provide UPE to all or to guarantee good learning outcomes. Dauda (2004:28) confirms this trajectory, when she observes that: '[i]n the past two decades, cash-strapped countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have been unable to provide rudimentary primary education systems'. This is compounded with the lack of robust data, which has affected the accuracy of

statistics of school enrolment and out-of-school children, which made planning for those who are excluded from and within the education system problematic. There is no efficient national birth registration system in Uganda, and therefore knowing the exact data on the unaccounted for children in the school system remains a challenge (Katrina 2006a). It is estimated that over one million children are out of school due to poverty, and this is just the tip of the iceberg because there are many children who are not in school but they are not known (Karugaba 2008).

It is in this regard that the public education system in Uganda can be described as dysfunctional. This is not distinctly a Ugandan problem. UNESCO (2010:3) notes that: '[s]ome 59 per cent of out-of-school children in sub-Saharan Africa are likely never to enrol in school - and 32 per cent, are likely to enrol late'. Johnson and Beinart (2008), citing Combs (1968), acknowledge that attention to the 'World Education Crisis', particularly in the education systems in developing countries was first raised in the 1960s, and many of these problems remain today and are most visible in the educational systems of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Johnson and Beinart (2008:7) argue that:

A large number of children remain out of school and for those who do enrol, less than half complete the primary education cycle. More worrying is the fact that of those who do complete Primary schooling, many leave with unacceptably low levels of knowledge and skills.

To highlight the dysfunctional nature of the educational system, Fabius Passi (1995:32) cited by Dauda (2004) described the Ugandan Primary schools as: 'a public Primary school under private management'. Mbabazi (2008:2) acknowledged that: '[s]ystems functioned poorly in the country in the 1970s and 1980s', noting that these problems have persisted even with the reforms under UPE, introduced in 1997. After over a decade of implementation there are significant achievements that have been realised by the government, however, there are also still major shortcomings, attributed to the dysfunctional system, which call for reforms to address the persistent inequalities and disparities between and within regions.

In summary corruption, bad administration, mismanagement of resources and dysfunctional systems, have all seriously undermined the Government's ability to deliver the UPE programme efficiently and effectively. These four sub-themes are closely intertwined and are the building blocks to the theme of mismanagement of resources. Adopting a policy that tackles head-on mismanagement of resources in UPE requires a strong commitment to aligning governance and management of schools and teachers and financing rules and an incentive mechanisms with the goal of learning for all (World Bank 2011). A more transparent transfer of resources, targeting all learners, especially those most at risk of exclusion and under-achievement is the key to a fair and inclusive education system accessible to the entire population.

5.5 Enduring Faith in Education

Our children also like education, but they are hampered by problems
(Focus group, Betty).

The fourth theme is *endurance*. To provide a historical perspective and some insights on this theme, I make a brief reference to the Heyneman (1977:256) study which found that: 'Ugandan children arrived in P7 for a mixture of other reasons (parental motivation, *endurance*, ability, health, wealth, proximity, etc)'. In this discussion, I describe this theme under these categories and key sub-themes: valuing education; attitudes towards education; and irresponsibility, which are the basis of this analysis. I start with valuing education.

The perception that poor and ordinary people do not *value education* presents us with a paradox. In my analysis these perceptions have been taken at face value without analysing the underlying causes of the apathy towards UPE. According to UNESCO (2010:12): '[r]emoving school fees is necessary to reach the poorest but is not enough on its own'. Local people face other barriers, shaped by family circumstances, income, and level of parental education and so on. One can therefore be forgiven for coming to the conclusion that these parents do not value education. In any case, Black *et al.*, (1999:111) state that: 'development of education in Uganda has, to some extent, been ... driven by the desires of

parents for a better life for their children’. Chambers (2000:63) reinforces this view arguing that in many developing countries:

A common hope for parents who get their children into school is that whatever their children can receive of primary, secondary and tertiary education will lead to a job in the bureaucracy whether in Government or the private sector.

Similarly, the study by Heyneman (1976a:209) in Uganda, found that: ‘[i]n contrast to more industrialised societies children, of the less privileged in Uganda want to do well in school and believe that doing well will strongly affect their occupational future’. This observation is explained further by Foster (1980:39) when he argues that:

Historically, in most of the less-developed world, the demand for education is linked to a desire on the part of the consumers to obtain full-time paid wage or salaried employment in the growing ‘modern sectors’ of the developing economies.

A critical analysis of the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process (UPPAP) can provide us with an insight into poor people’s perceptions and why those in authority (administrators, bureaucrats and some politicians) concluded, that poor people do not value education. Higgins and Rwanyange (2005:15) state: ‘UPPAP 2 found that while education was still highly valued by communities as a means of rising out of poverty, the current education in Uganda is perceived to be of limited worth’. The local people did not see any difference between themselves and those who ‘wasted’ many years in school, but ended up returning to the village with nothing, and resorted to doing the same things that the local people did, such as petty business and subsistence farming, which is possible even without having gone through UPE.

The theoretical approaches used in this study can make it possible to attempt to predict the learning outcomes of the UPE policy and the future success of children. Similarly, empirical studies referenced in Chapter 2 and in the practical findings in Chapter 4, section 4.2.3 among others indicate that family circumstances and the school environment can determine educational

achievement. This reality is described by Teese and Lamb (2007:293) who argue that:

Families with social power use education as a system for staking claims on status, life-style, income and occupations. Families without social power rely on Governments to assert these claims on their behalf or compensate them for unforeseeable claims.

Yet governments are known to fail poor citizens because social claims are determined by the cultural context and the culture of powerful people, which takes precedence over the dominated people (Teese and Lamb 2007). Therefore the assumption that poor people are not interested in education and therefore do not value education is based on a flawed premise. In any case, it is the enduring faith in education, that poor people hope is the sure way out of marginalisation, deprivation and an escape out of poverty. The Poverty Eradication Action Plan, 2004, noted that people consider education as one of the ways out of inequality (MFPED 2004), this is given as one of the key pillars of the Governments anti-poverty strategy.

Also, in contrast to the current trend of primary education, with the regionally remote regions underperforming since the launching of the UPE in 1997, the Stephen Heyneman (1977:246) study conducted 30 years ago in the 67 Primary schools in Uganda found that:

Children in urban schools might have been expected to score higher than those in semi-rural ones, and those in semi-rural schools higher than those in rural schools. The opposite, however, proved to be the case.

The recent data and my analysis indicates that these assumptions have changed. The authors of the Uganda's ESIP (MoES 2004:13), for example observed that: 'children of poor families come to school with fewer intellectual, social, and economic resources and require more attention'. If we are to go by Heyneman's findings, we could conclude that educational achievement in the 1970s was perhaps more equitable and therefore, the levels of regional inequalities were lower than is the case today. Even when there was minimal payment of school

fees in the 1970s, remote areas were better placed to register good PLE results compared to the present when UPE and 'free' education was introduced. The rural areas which were expected to benefit most from this policy are trailing in all indicators, of enrolment, retention and learning outcomes since the launch of the UPE policy in 1997.

Second, and related to the aforementioned sub-theme, is the social construction that poor people have *negative attitudes* towards education. The assessment and administrative reports by the Ministry of Education and Sports suggest that those children who are out-of-school in the poor rural villages and other deprived locations have negative attitudes towards education. These views are also widely held by some Primary leavers, community members and leaders, including the media, which often carry this same message. In one interview, a Primary leaver from a village school told us that: 'parents will say "even if my child does not go to school, it does not matter, aren't there people who have never gone to school?"' (Focus group, Dinnah); while the deputy head teacher of a Soroti Municipality school observed that parents with a low level of education have a negative influence on the schooling of their children. Rather than encourage their children, such a parent may utter statements such as: 'if I have not gone to school, will you manage what is coming ahead of you' (Face-to-face interview). This negative attitude is perhaps based in part, due to the perceived low market returns owing to the poor quality education. Parents and their children are disengaged with education due to disillusionment with the UPE policy where hundreds of thousands of pupils were herded into ill-structured and poorly equipped schools, often under trees, taught by under motivated and uninterested teachers. These conditions served to entrench these negative attitudes towards UPE. However, the enduring faith in education is what seems to have kept these poor children and youths going to school.

Third, and related to negative attitudes, is the social construction of the poor people *as irresponsible*. The conventional debates about the persistence of poverty tend to be based on the socially constructed idea that the poor themselves are responsible for their plight. Muhumuza (2007:76-77) observes that:

Poverty in Uganda has been partly attributed to individual practices like laziness, alcoholism, extravagance, lack of cooperation, and cultural practices like polygamy, oppression of women and high bride price.

Empirical evidence suggests that alcoholism is a result of frustration caused by poverty (Bourdieu 1991). The excessive indulgence with alcohol by poor parents, or their lack of cooperation could be attributed to extreme poverty. In fact Shaeffer (2010:6-7) argues that in any discussion of who is excluded, is where the blame lies for this exclusion:

Ask the average mid-level Ministry of Education official why children don't enrol in - or drop out of - school and the first several answers will usually 'blame the victim' - the children themselves (lazy, stupid, absent) or their parents (poor, ignorant, unaware of the value of education, using their children for house work or economic activities).

In the study, *Children's perception of poverty, participation and local governance in Uganda*, Witter and Bukokhe (2004:650) argue that: '[p]arents do not know what they are supposed to do, as a result they choose not to educate their children, or do not discourage them from dropping out of school'. The literature is socially constructed to suggest that these poor people are ignorant and therefore are unaware of the Government initiatives or parental duties and responsibilities. According to Robert Chambers (2000:83): '[t]o blame the victims is perhaps the most widespread and popular defence'. It is noted in this study, that bureaucrats, policy makers and politicians have conveniently blamed poor parents for not sending their children to school. It is undeniable that it is the poor parents who are more unlikely to compel their children to go to school, because *inter alia*, of where they are (in slums, remote areas with no schools) of how they live (in poverty, unable to afford the costs of schooling even when provided free) and who they are (ethnic minorities, or their culture rejects schooling e.g. no education for girls). It is also the case that, once in school these groups are not prevented from dropping out so that they can help to augment family income or labour, or were pushed out of school by the nature of school itself (a language they cannot understand, e.g. the use of the dominant regional languages in multi-linguistic areas, inflexible and irrelevant curricula,

difficulties in gaining initial literacy, increasing discretionary costs of schooling and so on) (Shaeffer 2010). Further, it is the case that these groups that are most at risk, are enrolled in school, but are not learning, because the teachers cannot respond adequately to their individual learning needs, or because of the low quality of education provided, fuelling the social construction that these parents are irresponsible and are to blame for their woes.

This analysis corroborates the literature and theory on family effects that family characteristics are a good predictor of the parental responsibility towards the education of their children (Buchmann and Hannum 2001; Zuze 2008). Empirical data suggests that illiterate parents are more likely to have large families in comparison to the families of the well-to-do and are most unlikely to afford school related costs for accessing UPE. SACMEQ II (2005) studies found large families a major characteristic in rural areas in Uganda. Large families were also presented as a major factor behind poor parents remaining in poverty (World Bank 2008). Studies in Uganda, have noted that positive attitudes towards modern health, wealth creation and improved wellbeing is linked to smaller family size and an increase in child survival. The fertility rate for women with secondary education is only 3.9 in comparison with 7.9 for those with no education and 7.8 for those with just primary education (UNHS 2005). Witter and Bukhoke (2004:651) observe that poor parents want large families, '[i]n order to bring extra labour into the household'. The key to tackling these societal problems that are excluding children from education is to address the causes of poverty, rather than the symptoms which manifest themselves as irresponsibility.

In deconstructing the accounts from the field, two important issues in regard to exclusion emerged from the data. The first is the multiple exclusion, which revolved around poverty, gender, ethnicity and other circumstances that overlap to limit opportunity and hamper social mobility (UNESCO 2010) and, a second important issue, is where the blame lies for exclusion in education and under-achievement in PLE. I argued that it is the enduring faith in education that unites all stakeholders, thus the need to get the Minister of Education and Sports to realise that it is their obligation to fulfil the right to education for all and to move away from explanations of educational failure that concentrate on the individual children and their families (UNESCO 2010; Shaeffer 2010). This faith

from parents and other stakeholders also carries a message of hope and, indicates the capacity of human beings to change what human beings have created. The next section outlines suggestions that research participants would like to see for meaningful change to occur.

5.6 Changes that Need to Occur

There is nothing permanent except change (Heraclitus, 6th C. BC)

The last theme that emerged from this study is the *changes that need to occur* for the UPE policy to become meaningful. In a world of rapid change and inadequate resources for education, it is expected that there will be losers and winners in the race to access better schools, teachers and facilities, and in the learning outcomes in the highly competitive terminal Primary leaving examinations. It is in this regard that the premium on innovation and creativity is higher than ever. The aim of this study was to find some ways of empowering ordinary people and to reduce poverty. The sub-categories that emerged from the data for these goals to be realised and for this change to occur include: re-naming and re-launching UPE; starting self-help and income generating initiatives; introducing policies and practice informed by research; bolstering community participation; and providing a conducive teaching - learning environment. Below, I analyse these suggestions by linking them to existing literature and theory.

The *first* category and sub theme for changes that need to occur is for research to analyse the ambiguities in the meaning of UPE, and how this could be explained so as to empower ordinary people. Citing Avenstrup *et al.*, (2004) Nishimura, Yamano, and Yuichi (2008:161) argue that: ‘many SSA Governments have abolished school fees for public primary education, under the name of the UPE or Free Primary Education policy’. UPE literally means ‘free’ of cost education, not subject to any burden or charge. Yet, our investigation confirmed that in spite of the abolition of school fees, UPE is not cost free. For example, Nishimura *et al.*, (2008) citing Mehrotra and Delamonica (1998); Black *et al.*, (1999) observe that: ‘the costs of school uniforms, meals, exercise books, local materials for building classrooms, and physical labour’, born by the parents,

have been identified as the key barrier for schooling for extremely poor children in Uganda. The SACMEQ II (2005) also noted costs as barriers to accessing UPE.

As can be seen, even with the less or unambiguous names such as 'Free' Primary Education (FPE) adopted in Malawi in 1994, or in Kenya in 2002, children from poor households in these poor developing countries are still expected to make contributions to cover costs for accessing free UPE. Therefore, changing the name from UPE to FPE (or vice versa) may be inconsequential, or as Tomasevski puts it 're-moulding the alphabetical soup of MDGs, EFA etc' (2006b:xi) will not make a difference if the real barriers are not addressed - in this case the numerous costs related to accessing UPE.

The UPE (or FPE) policy was socially constructed by the Government as synonymous with free education. This raised euphoria especially among the extremely poor families with expectations of local people raised to an unacceptably high level, albeit with disappointing results. It is in this context that the local people suggested that the Government should *re-name and re-launch UPE*. Any re-launch, however, ought to devise policies and strategies to reduce or remove the direct and indirect costs associated with accessing UPE as it is apparent that UPE entails costs, some of which are prohibitive, making this policy inaccessible to all school-age and out-of-school children or youths. Yet, the ambiguity - intended or unintended - to disguise the real costs of UPE is what constitutes the biggest obstacle to making primary and basic education all-encompassing, free and compulsory. The Government may not pay heed to the demand by ordinary people to be upfront so that people know exactly what to expect as, it is not politically expedient to do so, as policy is ultimately a political instrument, and UPE has been used to win elections and retain power. Evidence which conflicts with the current social construction that UPE is free and successful is rejected or downplayed, whereas that which supports this policy as successful is accepted and highlighted.

The *second* category of changes proposed was *starting self-help and income generating initiatives*. Cost is the main cause of drop-out and poor educational outcomes among poor households. Therefore, strategies to raise income and assets can buffer poor parents from the costs related to the schooling for their children (Sen 1999; Narayan *et al.*, 2000). This suggestion seems to be applicable

in the context of developing countries where there are extreme inequalities in school resources and family socio-economic status. Agricultural productivity in my analysis cannot be removed from discussions about income generating activities, as a means to improve the household incomes to augment the numerous school costs since 86 per cent of Ugandans depend on agriculture for their livelihood (UBOS 2002). A study in Soroti by Okiasi (1993:93) arrived at the same conclusion that: '[i]f anything, free education may not become meaningful so long as nothing is done to improve agricultural prices and therefore incomes'. The UNDP (2007:41) Report describes the context in the rural areas in Uganda succinctly:

The majority of the rural poor depend on agriculture for most of their livelihoods, and they live in regions where arable land is scarce, agricultural potential is low, and drought, floods, and environmental degradation are common. Access to basic human needs - education, portable water, health care, and sanitation - is far less available.

Unfortunately, although the Government's grand plan for transforming agriculture from subsistence farming into commercial ventures is a good idea, there is very little to show for it. The existence of programmes like the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) initiated by the Government has scarcely made any impact in the villages, as my field study revealed. I did not see any sign that subsistence farming has been transformed into commercial ventures in Kamuda, as people still use rudimentary tools for farming. The only existing demonstration farm in Kamuda (Odina farm) is derelict, and is not being used to its optimal capacity in spite of NAADS.

One Primary leaver had grander ideas about income generation through availing generating employment opportunities and improving the economy in the region: 'Government can help us by constructing some industries which can employ people and allow youths who acquired some education but dropped out and are jobless'. He also suggested that, besides extending industries as a means of fighting poverty, the Government could help young school drop-outs 'to open some business in town along the streets' (Focus group, Ali). A combination of self-help initiatives, income generating activities and industrial development could improve the levels of income and standards of living for the poor people

living in the regionally deprived areas and districts. However, as evident in this analysis, these inequalities are due to politics and the latent regionalism along ethnic lines (Mukwaya *et al.*, 2008). This calls for political solutions to eliminate disparities and inequalities, which is the overarching theme in this thesis.

The *third* category and sub-theme to explain changes that need to occur was that future *policies and practice must be informed by evidence and research*. The imposition of the top-down approach in the 1997 UPE policy (Dauda, 2004), which excluded the voices of ordinary people or those of educators with experience in primary education was unfortunate. These alternative voices attempted to moderate the impacts of the sudden launch of UPE in favour of the incremental approach recommended by the 1992 Government White Paper on Education policy (Moulton *et al.*, 2002). The big bang approach enabled all children to go to school, however, not without its setbacks. The sudden launch of UPE reversed the quality indicators and exacerbated the low retention, completion and learning outcomes. UNESCO (2011:49) noted that:

The persistence of high dropout rates in countries such as Malawi and Uganda, where school fees were withdrawn over a decade ago, demonstrates the long-term difficulties in maintaining education quality and school retention after a rapid increase in intake.

Combs (1985) cited in Namarome (1995:25), pointed out that the rapid expansion of education, unless well planned for, is likely to outstrip the available resources of personnel and physical facilities resulting into a fall in the quality of education. In the context of developing countries, he adds that: “‘more’ education has come to mean ‘worse’ education as reflected by the increase in the number of poorly qualified teachers, bulging enrolments leading to overcrowded classrooms, shortages of textbooks and other materials’.

In addition, and related to the theme of powerlessness, is the issue of the language of instruction in schools. This thesis concludes that the language policy context leading to the launch of the thematic curriculum did not apply the principles of equity nor provide an objective review of the recommendations of the 1992 White Paper. The language policy context in Uganda is by no means complicated, considering that Uganda is multi-ethnic and multi-lingual.

However, by *prescription of the dominant languages in the thematic curriculum*, and then directing schools to teach in these dominant languages either as a language of instruction or as a taught subject in multi-lingual classrooms, is a manifestation of the perpetuation of the inequalities under UPE. The Government's rationale for non-inclusion of minority languages in the thematic curriculum is that they do not have orthographies. In the case of the national language, Kiswahili, that it lacks teachers. Nsookwa (2008) contests the notion that there are no teachers, observing that there is an abundance of teachers and resources in Kiswahili. Rather, the problem is a lack of commitment by the bureaucrats. This is well documented by Moulton *et al.*, (2005) in their assessment of the education reforms in Uganda, where they observed that bureaucrats ignored, discriminated or exploited any excuse not to promote Kiswahili. One reason is for the maintenance of the status quo, to keep the elite as elite and the dominant groups dominant. Mukama (1991) argued that a non-inclusive or discriminatory policy (such as the thematic curriculum for instance) can 'engender bitterness' and does not augur well for a country trying to forge national unity from a highly polarised society.

Eilor (2005), a planner with the Ministry of Education and Sports states that: '[t]he choice of language for initial instruction may privilege majority tribal groups and disempower minority ones'. This fits in with Bourdieu's social production theory, according to Finley (1995), who argues that: '[d]ominant groups determine the standards and selection based on their power within institutions' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970 and Sennet and Cobb 1972 cited in Finley 1995:227). Therefore, whereas instruction in mother tongue is crucial for learning (UNESCO 1953 cited in Fishman 1968), such factors as unequal power relations need to be taken into account while designing the language of instruction policies in the context of a multilingual and a multiethnic society such as Uganda. This thesis acknowledges that, whereas Ugandan schools do not have the capacity or the resources to teach several mother tongues in the same school, in the same classrooms, equal linguistic rights for every Ugandan child, should be acknowledged and respected. This could be achieved by introducing them to the national language in the urban and cosmopolitan areas, which is both fair and equitable rather than teaching in the dominant languages, which may not necessarily be the mother tongue of all the learners. UNESCO (2011:3) notes, that 'No country can hope to live in peace and prosperity unless it builds

mutual trust between its citizens, starting in the classroom'. Therefore, promoting teaching in the neutral and non-ethnic national language (can build trust and assure equal opportunities for all communities with equity, as no ethnic group is favoured by national resources, and therefore avoid legitimatising the present linguistic and cultural hegemony of some groups. Overall, evidence-based research has some potential advantages, provided that it is conducted objectively and rigorously with the ultimate goal to stimulate positive change.

The *fourth* category and sub-theme for the necessary change to occur is *community participation*. Improved participation empowers people and empowers groups, yet this opportunity was missed during the launching of UPE. The Uganda UNDP MDG (2007:22) Report noted that: '[p]articipation of local leaders and communities in the UPE programme is still limited; which impacts negatively on its sustainability'. Likewise, in her study of UPE in Jinja district in Eastern Uganda, Dauda (2004:30) writes that:

The national Government, in its quest to show its effectiveness and deliver the election promise early, employed a take-charge, top-down approach. Public participation was the first to go as all PTAs were immediately banned.

The Government had a valid case for the scrapping of PTAs. The data from the fieldwork suggest that this policy directive by the Government to abolish PTAs because these associations had become exploitative had the opposite impact. Parents were the major forces that sustained education during the period of crisis (Carasco *et al.*, 2001; Passi cited in Dauda 2004). The historian, Ssekamwa (2000) also notes that parents were instrumental in keeping schools going during the difficult times in Uganda. Immediately, after the introduction of UPE, the role of parents and communities was reduced, and the state took over the education sector. Parents and communities were frustrated because their involvement in decision making in UPE was minimal, at best symbolic. One member said: 'the Government just dictates on some matters' (Focus group, Meru) such as designing the budgets for the SFG and allocating funds to some items that the community do not see as a priority. Because of this alienation, Owakubariho (2007:24) argues that: '[s]chool governing bodies like PTAs and

SMCs feel they have little to contribute to the programme managed by the state'. Mbabazi (2008:9) notes that: '[t]he Ministry of Education has conceded that the "[l]ow community participation in the implementation of UPE" is a challenge'.

To improve community involvement in UPE, the Kamuda assessment by World Vision (2006) recommended that involvement of the communities at all levels of the programme - starting with assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation among others - should be reinforced such that a sense of ownership and sustainability is created. Similarly, the Ministry included community participation as one of the key recommendations in its Annual Education Sector Review (MoES 2005: xviii):

There should be greater promotion of local community participation in educational activities so as to strengthen partnership, ownership, accountability, efficiency and sensitivity to local challenges.

It should be noted that there is no guarantee that community participation will result in local democracy and it is naïve to think that this will happen automatically. The Uganda UNDP MDG (2007:22) Report notes that, '[e]nlisting genuine interest, motivation and participation of parents, local leaders and communities requires greater efforts in raising awareness and building local capacities through sensitisation'. Thus, participation ought to be encouraged with a conscious effort to include all stakeholders especially the local people and particularly those disadvantaged communities in the regionally deprived areas who are in urgent need of support.

The *fifth* category and the sub theme that emerged from the analysis is that local people want a *conducive teaching-learning environment*, as the key to ensuring that meaningful changes occur in the education system. The Ministry of Education and Sports administrative and assessment reports indicate that there has been a sharp increase in teachers, schools, and classroom blocks and so on. However, my fieldwork and analysis indicate that the teaching-learning environment situation is still dire. The quantitative data derived from the Ministry of Education Statistical abstracts under-play the absence of a conducive teaching and learning environment which is impacting negatively on quality and

endurance, especially in the poorer, remote and insecure districts which suffer most from the absence of infrastructure, safe and clean water and an appalling teaching-learning environment. The World Bank Report (2006) concluded that quality education is absent in most Ugandan villages. Moreover, non-formal education opportunities or flexible or alternative learning are rare. Even where non-formal education opportunities are provided, it is delivered in rundown premises by uninterested and untrained providers.

In sum, these five sub categories and suggestions in this theme of the changes that need to occur, are far from exhaustive - they simply illustrate those areas that participants proposed and identified as significant for meaningful change to occur in the Ugandan context. To reinforce the need for change, Johnson and Beinart (2008:10) argue that:

If educational systems do not change sufficiently and inherently retain the features of the past, there is a real danger of cementing other horizontal inequalities - in income, employment, nutrition and health as well as political positions.

In my analysis, there are compelling arguments for the need to change the way UPE is being implemented if we are to make education equitable in order to eliminate disparities and inequalities (MoES 1999a). Logically, the Government's vision and mission can only be met if the poorest, and most marginalised school-age, and out-of-school children and youths currently excluded are brought into the school system. Yet, as observed, the UPE model is rigid, inflexible and is unsuited to meet the education aspirations of these disadvantaged and vulnerable children and youths. This calls for innovative and flexible methodologies encompassing informal, formal or non-formal strategies, with a curriculum that enables all children, young people and adults to participate productively in learning, both in and out-of-school, so that they can benefit their communities and society at large.

5.7 Summary of Analysis of the Data

In Chapter 5 of the thesis, I subjected the field data to numerous analyses, until the five key themes emerged, viz, regional inequality; (mis)management;

powerlessness; enduring faith in education; and changes that need to occur. I then structured my analysis thematically by integrating critical ethnography, social constructionist and the emancipatory paradigms to make connections between research, theory and practice in this investigation to understand whether or not the 1997 UPE policy has eliminated the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda in the past decade (1997-2007) of implementation.

The theme of *regional inequality* that emerged from my analysis of the current state of knowledge and the findings from the field revealed that inequalities between regions have become more pronounced, most conspicuously between the affluent Southern (West and Central) regions and the poor Northern (North and North-Eastern) regions through various forms, based on knowledge, money and power and manifested itself in terms of the rural versus urban, gender, and the subtle inequalities based on ethnic and cultural background. In order to address these challenges, the key question was which equality strategy to adopt? I argued that a targeted policy approach to address the socio-economic and political struggles played out in schools and the community can provide the opportunity for creating a fairer society (Higgins 2009).

Secondly, is the theme of *(mis)management*. While the Government has put in place a number of legal and regulatory frameworks to fight corruption, the fight against this vice is still far from over, because of the scale of fraud and the incompetence of the state in apprehending many of the public officials who are corrupt. Kanyeihamba (2009:10) argued that:

The proper exercise of executive power means a radical departure from the prevailing attitudes, whether official or unofficial, which appear to condone wrong-doing and reward corruption in public administration.

He argues that the courts are the last bastion of justice for the defence of freedoms and rights of individuals against oppression and injustices, yet public authorities are reluctant to confront the executive, while parliament, which is the symbol of democracy and liberty, has showed partiality in tackling corruption. Poor people bear the brunt of poor governance most, while in all

cases, the powerful are the beneficiaries of such a system (Sen 1999; UNDP 2002; Preece 2006).

Third, was the theme of *powerlessness*. In contrast to poor people, wealthy parents have considerable constitutional, legal and cultural resources, and are confident in their relationship with teachers on school and classroom issues. A community member's likening local people to children (or toddlers) is a powerful analogy to show their powerlessness. According to Kanyeihamba (2009) those in power are now more concerned with the protection of the status quo at the expense of priorities to eradicate poverty, disease, and ignorance. This has caused a sense of profound helplessness among poor people, especially for those living in the rural and remote post-conflict regions in the North and North-East, who exhibit the worst poverty and education indicators.

Fourth, was the theme of *enduring faith in education*. The analysis indicated the resilience of Uganda's' education system in the face of fragility. Therefore, in spite of the grim prospects in the indicators such as absence of good quality education within the villages and the remote areas, and the persisting inequalities between and within regions, the local people seemed to have an enduring faith, not in the UPE policy *per se*, but in education in general, as the quickest way out of poverty. The dominant social construction that poor people do not value education, hence their abysmal performance or drop-out, is not based on the deeper understanding of the underlying causes of underachievement or on the factors why local people have a negative attitude to UPE. We argue in Chapters 6 and 7 that the Government should instead investigate issues about aspirations, motivations and social attitudes, as well as the disillusionment with UPE, so as to derive the basis for informed policy implementation rather than, concentrating on blaming poor children and families for their educational failure.

Finally, is the theme of *changes that need to occur* for the UPE policy to become meaningful. Green (2008:433) writes that: '[a]chieving change is often about shifting the balance of power between different players, and positive change often involves shifting it in favour of poor people and their organisations'. We concluded that research participants felt helpless to change their situation. The 1997 UPE policy had generated the greatest expectations that the Government

had made education all encompassing, free and compulsory. However, local communities were disillusioned as this was not the reality. Tomasevski (2006a and 2006b) argued that nobody is likely to publicly assert that children should pay for primary education because that would be unacceptably cruel. But that is what children are forced to do.

These five themes in Chapter 5 suggested that, although there was a surge in enrolments (MoES 2005), because of the introduction of the 1997 UPE policy, there was no fundamental shift or change in the existing social inequalities in Uganda. In addition, UPE did not provide viable alternatives considered flexible and suitable to the needs of the school-age, out-of-school children and young adults. The analytical work has not solved all the questions set out in this study, neither are the proposed changes proposed by ordinary people exhaustive. They are however important to improving the performance of the UPE policy. This empirical study provided an opportunity for those who are often silent in the production of knowledge (because they do not control or have the opportunity to engage in such empirical work) to provide alternative perspectives that yielded some important insights for policy action. In the next Chapter, I suggest some conclusions and implications to address the critical issues that have been raised in this enquiry to help guide the education reforms.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Only when we are clear about the kind of society we are trying to build can we design our educational service to serve our goals (Julius Nyerere 1968:50).

6.1 Introduction

This Chapter brings together all the elements that I have developed in this study on the regional poverty and educational inequalities since the launch of the 1997 UPE and PEAP initiatives. I adopted inter-subjectivity in writing this account, reflecting an integrated approach by using critical ethnography, social construction and emancipatory paradigms. There are pertinent issues that have underpinned these conclusions and implications. The notable ones being whether education should be organised to further the common good with equal opportunity for all, or whether education should be organised for individual gain to further individualistic aspirations. Ultimately, this thesis was about comparing inequality between regions to develop strategies for eliminating disparities and inequalities in learning outcomes.

The UNESCO (2008:64) report notes that, '[t]here is more to UPE than getting children into school: retention, completion and learning outcomes are also critical'. In the broadest terms, I focused this Chapter of the thesis examining learning outcomes by comparing educational achievements at the end of Primary schooling for Primary school leavers from schools in three distinctive educational settings. I also draw upon the SACMEQ II (2005) study which has vast amounts of secondary data, with an entire Chapter 8 ('An Agenda for Action') with 37 policy suggestions, some of which directly address the multiple challenges that the Ministry of Education and Sports faces in providing quality education to the hard-to-reach or disadvantaged children. I draw attention to the thesis as a whole, rather than results from individual Chapters, providing evidence and improved knowledge and understanding of the state of UPE; the perception of ordinary people about UPE; evidence as to whether UPE and NFE have helped poor people to escape poverty; how UPE and poverty are socially constructed; and proposals

from local people about how UPE and NFE could be better designed to make them meaningful.

In the following sections, I provide a series of conclusions and implications for each of the five research questions of this study and the work as a whole linking them to the overall research aims and how the study contributes to knowledge in this discipline. I start with the first research question on the state of regional inequalities.

6.2 Persistence of Regional Inequalities

Research question 1: What is the state of the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda a decade after the launching of the 1997 UPE policy?

Finding the causes of the persistence of the regional inequalities despite over a decade of UPE and poverty reforms was an arduous task. The historically, socially and economically structured inequalities of the colonial era, coupled with the multiple sources of disadvantage related to insecurity of the 1990s which resulted in the destruction of basic infrastructure, and loss of family assets, gender, disability and ethnolinguistic background are among the primary causes of widespread poverty, all of which pose a significant risk to educational progress. The key conclusions arising from the first research question of this thesis are juxtaposed with the findings from SACMEQ II and elsewhere where applicable, so that the best solutions are identified in order that UPE could be transformed to better meet the demands of the 21st century. These conclusions are given next.

i. *The Government is committed to raising educational standards, and eradicating gender and regional inequalities; however, this study concluded that this agenda remains unfinished.* Heyneman's study of Uganda in the 1970s found that it is those remote areas far from administrative centres that excelled in the Primary leaving examination (PLE). However, my findings indicate that the national trends in the PLE results reveal that the worst performing districts today are in the poor, remote, peripheral regions, particularly those in the North and North-East, furthest from the industrial hub in Central Uganda - Kampala, Mukono and Wakiso. The findings of Heyneman's study have been stalled or even

reversed owing to a number of factors over the 1990s and into the 21 century, including civil war, insecurity, poverty and indifference by central Government. The dramatic expansion in enrolment under UPE was accompanied by disappointing learning outcomes with youths leaving school and entering the workforce without the knowledge or skills necessary for a competitive national and global economy. Similarly, inequality between gender, regions, wealth groups and urban/rural areas have increased. The SACMEQ II (2005) study recognised some of these challenges and provided some policy suggestions to address the inequalities in learning achievements between rural-isolated schools and schools in large cities as given next:

SACMEQ II (2005:157) Policy Suggestion 7.2: The Director of the Education Standards Agency needs to investigate the large gaps in pupil achievement levels between rural-isolated schools and schools in large cities with the aim of finding ways of improving the achievement levels of pupils in schools located in rural and isolated locations.

Further, the thesis concluded that efforts have been made and real progress realised in reducing the gender gap. However, gender disparities still remain a serious matter in Uganda and the bigger gap is between rural and urban areas and between regions within the country. The SACMEQ II (2005) study provided some policy suggestions to address the inequalities in gender achievement as given next:

SACMEQ II (2005:49) Policy Suggestion 3.2: Gender parity is one of the EFA and MDG goals to be achieved by 2005 in Primary schools. The Commissioner for Primary education should address the issue of persistent gender disparities in Primary school enrolment by strengthening multi-media campaigns to sensitize parents to send girls to school and to keep them in school.

ii. *Hunger is a key factor responsible for much of the suffering of children who come from poor households.* Hunger is responsible for non concentration, absenteeism, dropping-out-of school and poor learning outcomes. The targeted efforts by the Government and Implementing Partners like WFP have a limited impact on the food for education programmes. Food provision, especially in the insecure regions, was externally driven by donors, with a limited uptake in the parts of the country that are affected by conflict (Kasirye 2009). The food rations were nutritionally insufficient to meet the calorie intake of these IDP families. The nutritional and health status of children is critical, and it is known that good health can improve attendance and school performance. Some researchers have underlined that under-nutrition affects children's' enrolment, educational attainment, cognitive abilities and lifetime earnings (Hadaad 2002). The field data reveals the existence of regional inequalities and suggests that for many teachers and children in the Central and Western regions of Uganda, going to school without expecting to have breakfast or lunch is almost unthinkable, but for many in the North and North-Eastern regions, that have suffered the brunt of conflict and insecurity, this is a daily reality. On a positive note the Ministry of Education and Sports acknowledges the serious problems caused by hunger. Although the Education Act 2008 notes that providing food is the responsibility of parents, the SACMEQ II study provides a policy suggestion to address this concern:

SACMEQ II (2005:56) Policy Suggestion 3.3: The Director of Education should map out in greater detail the needy areas for targeted support programmes such as the feeding programmes in Primary schools.

The conclusion in this thesis is that providing food for education will encourage involvement and success in education. The World Bank (2009) citing WFP (2006) reached a similar finding, observing that formal and non-formal education systems that provide on-site meals have been successful in raising the participation of vulnerable children.

iii. The UPE policy has increased the stratification of schooling according to quality and social and financial status. Besides the 'traditional' schools, located mostly in the affluent regions, private schools have dominated in the terminal national PLE performance since the introduction of UPE in 1997. The reasons for the good performance are obvious. Pupils in well managed private schools perform better than their counterparts in most public UPE schools, owing to better teaching and learning materials and a conducive school environment. My findings support the study in India described by Kamat (2007), where she argues that the Government schools are written off as uniformly of poor quality and only the poor send their children to Government schools, except in the rural remote areas where a private school may not exist. In Uganda, the rise in private Primary schools especially in the Central region, and around the city and urban areas where the wealthier in the country live, explains the deepening disparities and inequalities in learning outcomes. Studies by Jencks and colleagues (1972) carried out in the US, found that school resources have little effect after controlling for family background, which prompted Gamoran *et al.*, (2007:28) to suggest that:

educational institutions and educational resources could not address inequalities as long as there were inequalities in parents' income, occupational status and education.

It is the poor who send their children to the poor quality UPE schools in Uganda, thus intensifying inequalities between and within regions and the stratification of schools according to social and financial status. Inequalities by their very nature are a subject of controversy, even more so when it is directed towards policies of reducing inequalities. Therefore, anybody trying to prove inequalities is doomed to fail because there are no systematic data to permit simultaneous analysis of the condition of poor people. What is clear, is that the poor generally receive fewer benefits from growth than the wealthy (Carron and Chau 1980). This observation is validated in recent analysis of Uganda (Appleton 2003, 2009; UBOS 2002, 2006 and 2009; UNDP 2007; Mukwaya *et al.* 2008, and UNESCO, 2011). The SACMEQ II (2005) acknowledges this challenge, and provides a general policy suggestion to address the differences in academic achievement between regions as given:

SACMEQ II (2005:160) Policy Suggestion 7.4: Ministry of Education and Sports must undertake further analyses of the SACMEQ data to determine factors which are associated with pupil achievement, with an attempt made to identify factors accounting for the big differences between schools. Thereafter, it must propose measures to improve achievement in those schools that have low performance in order to reduce the differences between schools.

iv. There are disparities between and within regions in literacy and numeracy among Ugandan children, which is a clear demonstration of the link between poverty and the regional inequality. Although the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) regularly conducts National Assessment of Progress (NAPE) exercises to test the competency levels of pupils in grades 3 and 6 nationally, the extent of the inequalities in literacy and numeracy can be deduced from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS 2002 and 2005), which indicate that Kampala in Central Uganda has a relatively higher literacy rate compared to other districts, with the North and North-East trailing the Central and Western regions.

The Ministry of Education and Sports', Education Sector Review Report for 2007 found that, despite the heavy investment of resources in the sub sector, it is quite startling to note that pupils are yet to attain desirable learning competencies in literacy and numeracy (MoES 2007). According to UNESCO (2008:41): '[a]bsolute learning levels are so low in many developing countries that millions of children complete school without acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills'. An analysis based on the World Bank evaluation study, by the Independent Evaluation Group (2007:1) conceded that:

there is clear evidence that the poverty reducing effects of Primary education come not from years of education received, but from improved literacy and numeracy.

The SACMEQ II study provided a policy suggestion to deal with illiteracy and innumeracy as given next:

SACMEQ II (2005:172) Policy Suggestion 7.6: The Ministry of Education and Sports should conduct a study to establish why such a large proportion of Primary 6 pupils are illiterate and innumerate. This study should be extensive, covering a broad range of factors such as the curriculum and its goals, pedagogical practices, learning materials and other key factors found to have a significant influence on achievement... Thereafter, it should design and implement a programme for enhancing pupil learning across the board.

The new World Bank Education Strategy (2011) reinforces this observation, and goes a step further stating that *people learn throughout life*, not simply during the years that they spend in formal schooling. In other words, education is not only about reading, writing and arithmetic (the 3R's) 'Social communication, teamwork, critical thinking and problem-solving skills are invaluable for people to function well at home, in their communities, and at work' (World Bank 2011:12).

6.2.1 Implications

The Government made significant progress since launching UPE in 1997, but national averages used to show success can also conceal disparities both within and between the different regions in the country. Any generalisations from this thesis must thus be treated cautiously. The field data provide compelling evidence that the regional educational and poverty inequalities in Uganda persisted due to the broader political and economic contexts and the hierarchical relationships that exist within schools. Those locations and regions with low literacy rates, are also more unlikely to have environments which stimulate demand for formal schooling. This means that children, youths and adults from these areas and regions are more likely to be locked out in the labour market later thus exacerbating poverty along regional lines.

For instance, more worryingly, due to regionalism, and the polarisation of politics along ethnic lines (Mukwaya *et al.*, 2008), the Central and Western regions which voted overwhelmingly for the President (in power since 1986) experienced growth as they were prioritised in infrastructural development and

increased public and private capital to generate employment opportunities, during the past decade of implementation of the UPE and poverty reforms. Those in the North and North-East who consistently voted against the Government witnessed protracted civil conflict, insecurity and poverty. These crises had a disproportionate impact on education services as physical facilities deteriorated, children were forced to work and teachers in the rural, remote and difficult areas were compelled to find other avenues for augmenting their income due to delayed or low salaries. Therefore, the regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda are both a technical as well as a political problem which demand a political solution.

6.3 Different Perceptions of UPE

Research question 2: What are the poor peoples' perceptions of UPE and how can it help to reduce regional poverty and educational inequality?

A key conclusion of this thesis is that, there is a disconnect between the perception of poor people and that of policy makers regarding UPE, NFE and poverty, arguably because perceptions are largely dependent on cultural, political, social, economic and religious values. The key conclusions and implications are presented as follows:

i. *The ordinary people's understanding of UPE is different from the official meaning which was clarified by the Education Act 2008.* The local people's understanding of UPE is hinged on the word 'free' in its literal sense. The numerous costs and hidden charges of accessing 'free' UPE may seem negligible for wealthy and middle income families; however these modest costs determine whether or not children from many poor Ugandan households can afford schooling. The assumption by ordinary households that the government was responsible for these numerous costs of accessing UPE may have contributed directly to the exclusion of the forty per cent who dropped out because school is too expensive (UNHS 2005/2006). This study in Uganda concurs with the Asia Development Bank (ADB) study, which noted that: '[c]hildren of poor families are less likely to enrol in and complete schooling because of the associated costs of attending schools, even when it is provided free' (ADB 2002:7). It is significant that the Ugandan Government made UPE legally compulsory through the

Education Act 2008, yet even after passing this Act, the Ministry cannot enforce this law because the required supply facilities i.e. schools, or the human and financial resources are insufficient to meet the demand. The perceptions of poor people of what UPE means, in my view, needs to be reconciled, rather than discounted, if the Government is committed to meet the target of the increasingly illusive universalisation of UPE by 2015.

ii. The Government focused on Primary education, with the launch of UPE in 1997 resulting in a dramatic expansion in enrolments. *The concentration on UPE however resulted in less focus on non-formal, life, and lifelong learning* which are important to prepare for livelihood. UPE is essentially, by its design, catering for the interests of a few households as only a small proportion of those children who enter formal UPE schools, stay on in the highly hierarchical pyramid of formal schooling, with estimates for the first cohorts of the 1997 UPE policy indicating that only 22 per cent completed the 7-year Primary school cycle in 2003. In my analysis, Uganda is unlikely to attain the target for the universalisation of UPE or halve poverty by 2015 by relying on the formal education alone. Nampota and Moleni (2006) support this preposition in their analysis of Malawi. They argue that the country's Education for All (EFA) and poverty reduction goals are unlikely to be achieved with formal education alone. My study suggests that the informal learning prevalent in most Ugandan villages is 'cost effective' and suited to the needs of the poor and vulnerable as they take into consideration why they are not in school. On the contrary, the low levels of participation in UPE is due to its rigid and inflexible nature to meet the needs of children from extremely poor and deprived households who need alternative or second 'change learning opportunities.

My conclusion therefore supports a study by UNESCO, MFPED and MoES (2005) in Uganda which recommended that we should, '[p]rovide non-formal education opportunities for young people and adults who have missed out on formal schooling' (2005:17) as a means to attain a holistic approach to lifelong learning. Non-formal education can create an enabling environment for learners to achieve their goals and develop their potential to participate fully in the community, society and work.

iii. *The vulnerable poorest and the most marginalised groups are affected most by poor quality education which will lead to more inequality.* Bategeka (2005) argues that the significant increase in enrolment following the abolition of school fees is an indication that payment of school fees was a big impediment to accessing education, especially for children from poor families. Likewise, Deininger (2003) argues that the two groups who benefitted most from the introduction of free Primary education were girls and children from the poorest quintiles. This argument is contradicted by literature which indicates that the children from extremely poor households who cannot afford the non-tuition costs like pens and pencils could have dropped out due to cost (Zuze, 2008). The PEAP 2004 further notes that: '[t]he increase in education has had a significant impact. However, this impact has been mainly experienced by the better-off households' (MFPED 2004:17). The modest cost of UPE has become too expensive for poor households to afford. Therefore, the claim that poor children have benefitted most from UPE is not unchallenged. The evidence from the fieldwork suggests that although children from impoverished households were the first to join schools when UPE was announced in 1997, they were also the first to withdraw when they found that accessing "free" UPE was not entirely cost free. The interactive dialogical critical ethnographic interviews and the social constructionist approach to the research revealed that extremely poor children absconded from UPE schools, because they felt ashamed of going to school in rags, while their peers were smartly dressed in uniform. One Primary school leaver said, such children would say: *'Even if you force me, I will not go'* (Focus interview, Isaac).

6.3.1 Implications

The different perspectives between policy makers and the poor people on what 'free' UPE means is likely to consolidate the inequality under UPE since knowledge is determined by those who hold power. For example, the elimination of fees is not a guarantee that all children will be able to access UPE or stay on until completion, with good learning outcomes due to numerous costs related to school attendance. The Ministry of Education and Sports, could target those vulnerable, poor and marginalised families who may not ordinarily access UPE even with the abolition of school fees, firstly, by providing cash subsidies

because such subsidies improve the ability of young children to attend school by reducing the financial burden on the families (INEE 2010), and secondly by encouraging flexible learning approaches with NFE as a viable alternative to formal education (Preece 2006; 2007), as this is more accessible to disadvantaged groups, in contrast to rigid formal school set up, which is the reason for their exclusion. If education becomes too expensive for households to afford, and if poor families require their children to work to meet the non-tuition costs, the right to education for the country's poorest children living in the remote and regionally deprived regions could be thwarted.

6.4 Evidence on whether or not UPE has helped the Vulnerable Poor to Escape Poverty

Research question 3: Is there evidence that UPE and NFE are helping poor people to escape from poverty?

It is too early to say whether or not the UPE policy has helped poor people to escape poverty, partly because a decade is a short time to measure the effects of this policy on poverty eradication, and partly because there is an absence of reliable data. I have provided three criteria to show progress namely: allocation of human and financial resources; improvement in the collection of disaggregated data; and administration and management of resources, as the means to present the conclusions and implications that address this research question. They follow:

i. Allocation of human and financial resources matters mostly in the remote and the poor regions, where there is an acute shortage of teachers, on extremely low salaries, and poor working conditions. This thesis concluded that the large increase in the teacher workforce resulted in a significant reduction in the pupil-teacher ratios from 65:1 in 2000 to 52:1 by 2006 (Kasirye, 2009). Pupil-teacher ratios in Uganda were among the highest in the world after the declaration of UPE, increasing by over 80 per cent in some regions (Deininger 2003). Yet, UNESCO (2010) notes that: 'Northern regions affected by conflict were marked by pupil/teacher ratios in excess of 90:1 - nearly double the national average. These staffing constraints and large classes are compounded by teacher absenteeism, and to impediments such as HIV/AIDS, which have all contributed

to a decline in the quality of education. There are many children who are not completing school, and many leave with unacceptably low levels of knowledge and skills UNESCO (2008). Extensive teacher workload and low motivation are key factors to explain the poor academic performance in the remote and poor rural schools. Motivated and well trained teachers are important in improving performance in school. Resources should be prioritised in the remote and the poor regions, which are most affected by lack of qualified teachers as these locations are benefiting least from the UPE policy contrary to popular discourse.

ii. Improve collection of disaggregated data to identify vulnerable groups and examine the factors that exclude them so as to design equity-focused solutions.

Tomasevski (1999) special rapporteur on the right to education in her report on Uganda writes that '[p]recise information on the [number] children who should be, but are not in school is lacking, one of the crucial obstacles being the absence of the registration of children at birth' (paragraph. 59). The out-of-school children tend to share such features as: access to substandard facilities and premises, high pupil-teacher ratios, overcrowded classrooms, poor quality teachers, and high attrition rates (UBOS 2005 and UNHS 2006). Administrative data from the Educational Statistical Abstracts are an important source of information available to policy makers and managers in Uganda. The national surveys and censuses provide complementary sources for the enrolment, repetition, and completion rates, but the data has not been analysed to indicate academic achievement or the profile of out-of-school children and long-term trends, or information on the pioneer UPE graduates by region, gender, socio-economic status and the learning outcomes etc. It is important for education policy makers and managers to generate relevant data on the trends of UPE in order to acquire a better overview and to make better use of such data. The education system has expanded, but the sector still faces complex and specific challenges. A systematic analysis of the barriers in reaching the underserved children in the regionally deprived areas and the cost effective use of resources in a more equitable manner can be realised by addressing the underlying problem of lack of robust data and analysis to fill the policy gaps.

iii. There were cases of corruption and mis-appropriation of resources for UPE.

Johnson (2008) suggests that Uganda has made progress by ensuring more transparency in managing UPE funds. He draws on the assessment by

commentators such as Reinikka and Svensson (2001) who outlined how the use of public information to tackle corruption ensured that over 90 per cent of the funding reached schools, instead of the 28 per cent in, 1996. The Ministry of Education and Sports now announces publicly, financial releases to districts, which are then posted on school notice boards. Further, the Ministry of Education and Sports is constantly updating its teacher records to curb the widespread fraud through ghost teachers who are still on the Ministry of Education and Sports payroll. There are multiple accountability mechanisms in existence today to tackle corruption, but the Government faced challenges while trying to eliminate corruption. Zuze (2008) noted that it was quite informative that the association between school facilities and achievement appeared in Uganda. Policies for expanding the facilities through the School Facilities Grant provided resource poor schools with funds to expand facilities using local contractors and materials (Penny, Ward, Read, and Bines 2007; Zuze 2008). Yet, there were cases of the construction of substandard classrooms (Bategeka 2005) through largely flawed procurement processes.

Corruption has essentially become institutionalized as 'normal' and many Ugandans now accept corruption as a way of life, and freely offer bribes to get public services. The Ugandan people and the Government need to realise that they all have a role to play in the fight against corruption. The school system is one solution to trigger behaviour change, by instilling a sense of national duty and patriotism so that youth, do not view public appointment as a chance to steal public funds, but to manage such resources and utilities for the national interest and societal development effort. In my opinion, when the people decide that it is not okay to give bribes for legitimate public services, and public servants stop asking to be paid for what they are supposed to do, and their seniors doing what they are not supposed to do, will we have come of age. The poor, as mentioned variously, suffer most from the misuse of public funds. We need to, 'recognise that a capable and accountable state creates opportunities for the poor' (World Bank 2011:62). The bribes demanded by corrupt executive, and judiciary officials, or public servants belongs to the taxpayers and is supposed to improve their lives.

6.4.1 Implications

The evidence from this study suggested that the broad policy objectives of providing equitable access to quality education for all Ugandans in an efficient manner, as well as providing a relevant education to all citizens to meet the challenges of life may be far from being met. Emphasising nation-wide access and enrolment statistics, while, underemphasising the rapid attrition rates have impacted negatively on tackling the causes of the regional, ethnic/population groups or gender inequalities. Without highlighting the inefficiencies, or coming up with a deliberate action plan to collect systematic data on the indicators on inequalities, the government may instead exacerbate the current predicament of the wider North, rural areas, and girls (throughout the country). The condition of these disadvantaged and deprived groups and regions may worsen and continue to draw outrage- but little action for redress. Changing attitudes about corruption and cultivating strong leadership is extremely difficult to accomplish, but these are key for any meaningful behaviour change to occur.

6.5 The Social Construction of Poor People

Research question 4: How are poor people in Uganda socially constructed and what is the impact of their social construction on UPE and NFE on the learning outcomes for learners?

Social construction has continued to be influential in constructing poverty and educational inequalities. The social constructionist approaches can help us to unmask the deeper reality underlying surface features so that truth can be revealed, and possibilities for change uncovered. In this research question, the key conclusions are outlined as follows:

i. Addressing the underlying causes of the high drop-out rates under the UPE policy. The vast majority (47 per cent) of those children who do not enter school, or who drop-out before completing, do so due to their lack of interest and negative attitudes towards education. ‘Malawi and Uganda have relatively high NERs [Net Enrolment Ratios], yet between one-quarter and one-third of pupils drop-out of first grade, in some cases never to return’ (UNESCO, 2010:4). The dominant social construction that poor people lack interest in education,

hence the high dropout rates, is taken at face value as fact without asking why these children are disinterested in UPE. Juma (2004: 80-81) in an assessment of the Kenyan context argues that: 'Contrary to the popular view, the children of marginalised groups and their parents have educational aspirations provided, they can afford to meet the costs of education'. In addition, Owens (2005:314) arguing from the Uganda context observes that education is highly 'esteemed' in Uganda. The overarching conclusion of this thesis can be summed up as expressed in a focus group, viz. '[o]ur children also like education, but they are hampered by problems' (Focus group, Akobia). From an emancipatory perspective, disinterest is a social construction by powerful people to shift the blame on poor parents rather than on the inadequacy of the UPE policy. In some cases, the school drop-out has been blamed on 'jiggers'¹⁴. This revelation suggests that the environment and classroom conditions in the UPE schools in these poor areas are not conducive for learning, considering that most rural schools have floors which are not cemented, and are thus a good breeding ground for jigger causing fleas. The inadequacy of the UPE policy to address the needs of the poor and most vulnerable children, could be attributed to the dysfunctional system, rather than on the victims, as is, socially constructed.

ii. The use of educational attainment indicators are a better measure of educational outcomes. The findings of the Heyneman (1976a, 1976b) study in Uganda found that schools located in remote areas, far from the administrative centres, performed better than those in big towns and cities, which was not the norm, as urban schools were expected to perform better. Roebuck (2008) citing an IOB (2008) study in Uganda reached another outcome. The secondary data focusing on learning achievement concluded that the Sector-Wide Approach, and later, the Budget Support, contributed to the successful introduction and the implementation of the UPE policy. A key finding of this thesis is that learning achievement is not evenly spread out in all regions, locations and areas in the country. One key to understanding these differences is the political, economic and security circumstances in the country. Whereas the Southern (Central and Western) regions who dominated key positions of power enjoyed relative peace and stability, the poorer Northern (North and North-East) regions, largely excluded from the positions of power in the past two decades, experienced insecurity and armed conflict (WCRWC 2005). These regions consistently performed poorly in all the poverty and educational indicators in the past

decade (UBOS, 2002, 2005 and 2009), yet, the dominant social construction is silent on the disparities, by deliberately avoiding publishing data which reveal the glaring inequalities in education attainment indicators in the country.

iii. *Recognise the disadvantaged and marginalised communities and regions, and apply targeted efforts that are needed to address the specific reasons for their exclusion.* These vulnerable groups are often ignored and blamed for their exclusion, an excuse used widely as a diversionary strategy to deflect accusations of neglect or discrimination. This is not a new phenomenon. According to Chambers (2000:83): '[t]o blame the victims is perhaps the most widespread and popular defence'. Similarly, Street (1995:18) argues that:

Governments have a tendency to blame the victims at a time of high unemployment and 'illiteracy' as one way of shifting debate away from the lack of jobs and onto people's own lack of supposed fitness for work.

In all these cases, it is better to blame the victims than to bear the responsibility oneself. The unemployed adolescents and young people in the urban areas are blamed by political leaders for idling in towns, without any questioning of whether the formal education these young children, youths and adults received under the UPE policy has given them the right knowledge, skills and attitudes for self sufficiency and readiness for work. The dominant constructions, such as 'idle' or 'ignorant' in my analysis are based on the unequal power relations. Nightingale and Cromby (1999:13) argue that: '[p]ower is always and already a significant factor in the processes of social construction whether it is acknowledged or not'. The powerful people decide their own interpretation of situations, according to their self interest. My conclusions thus dispelled the myth and illusion that poor people are to blame for their predicament. Instead, the evidence suggested that the inadequacy of the UPE policy and the requirement for households to meet non-tuition costs is a big factor to explain why poor children and their parents are accused of being disinterested in UPE.

iv. *Family circumstances are a good predictor of parental responsibility towards the education of siblings.* The Report by Coleman *et al.* (1966) revealed strong

family effects on student achievement. My findings support the empirical evidence and studies that suggest that illiterate parents are more likely to have large families in contrast to more educated parents who have healthier children. The latter are more unlikely to afford school related costs for accessing “free” UPE. Yet, the Government has socially constructed these poor parents as ‘saboteurs’ and issued threats for their arrest and imprisonment (Mugerwa *et al.*, 2008). This approach, in my analysis, is counterproductive, as the Government is incapable of meeting the needs of all these vulnerable children, for instance, there is an abundance of street children in the major towns in Uganda, such as the Karamojong children pushed out of their homes due to hunger and drought from their districts of origin, or even the 47 per cent of those Ugandan children who do not enter school, or who drop-out before completing the primary cycle. The approach to adopt in my view, is to first understand the obstacles preventing these children from going to UPE schools, and then address the root cause, rather than the symptoms. The dominant social constructions provide an inaccurate picture of the reality and may not necessarily portray the interest of the children or the adult learners.

6.5.1 Implications

The implication of this conclusion is that parents, no matter how poor, have a duty to educate their children under UPE. The Government has socially constructed a rosy picture demonstrating that UPE has been a phenomenal success, while shifting the blame for what has gone wrong to poor parents and children. Unfortunately, this social construction overlooks the numerous costs such as uniform, examination fees, and meals etc. which are prohibitive for many poor Ugandan households. The dominant social constructions mean that the vulnerable poor children and the marginally deprived regions have remained invisible in the policy debate. Likewise, NFE, adult education or lifelong learning have received little focus, as it was assumed that UPE would fulfil this role of universalising education and lifelong learning. The social constructionist approach adopted, for this study, has raised awareness and empowered the discourse to uncover ‘truths’ and ‘myths’ to ensure that those who are more likely to be marginalised are made more visible.

6.6 The Views of Local People on Desirable Changes

Research question 5: How can UPE be meaningfully designed to help reduce poverty and educational inequality?

This section presents some proposals made by local people for tackling some of the problems of the 1997 UPE policy in order that it might be effective. The following are some of the changes they wish to see occur.

i. *Target resources to the disadvantaged and under-served populations as a strategy to address the regional imbalance and to reduce disparities.* The Soroti District Development Report (2008), points out that, the development initiatives have failed to differentiate between the extremely poor members of the community who have not benefited from the development interventions over the years. This report argues that it is these poor who should have been prioritised for help, rather than the average middle income and well-to-do families. These poor households are still expected (officially or un officially) to bear the economic burden of providing school related costs such as uniforms, pens, pencils, mid-day meals and co-curricular activities.

Gamoran and Long (2007:41) argue that there are different ways of organising policies that favour poor people:

Firstly, policies that have greater benefit for disadvantaged children, than their more advantaged peers, should be enacted across the board, and secondly, policies that have similar effects on all students, should be focused mainly on disadvantaged children.

This thesis observed that targeted approaches were implemented to address the regional inequalities, especially between the impoverished wider North and the affluent South and Central. These approaches are the most practical and cost-effective way of meeting the needs of children from the poor households if applied well. However, this approach has limited application for the UPE context in Uganda, as the UPE policy currently does not target the extremely impoverished households, because of the universalist nature of the policy approach. Children of privileged groups in the affluent regions attend and

complete Primary school with good academic outcomes in the terminal examinations in quality schools, while children from poor households and poor neighbourhoods are lagging behind in all the education and poverty indicators.

ii. *Income Generating Activities (IGAs) were proposed as a means to tackle extreme poverty which is impacting on education services.* In my investigation, I concluded that IGAs cannot discount the role of agriculture, since the majority of Ugandans, estimated at about 86 per cent, live in the villages and depend on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood (MFPED 2004). Needs in society vary according to socio-economic lines; higher income households are able to spend more on education related costs than lower income households. Poverty therefore, provides an essential ingredient in understanding why income-generation is important for the poor households who cannot afford the numerous basic costs related to assessing education, or, why children from the poor households are pulled out of school to work. It is important to note that as Gamoran and Long, (2007:28) citing Jencks and his colleagues (1972) argue: 'educational institutional resources could not address inequalities as long as there are inequalities in parents' income, occupational status and education'. Schools in the villages are under-resourced and the people living in the villages are mostly poor peasants with extremely low income. Therefore, IGAs can serve a dual role: they can provide possibilities to subsidise both the cost of schooling as well as boost the income of the impoverished households. These poor communities need to be supported as it is unlikely that they have assets to secure loans, which are necessary for income-generation or starting small or medium size businesses.

iii. *The implementation of a large scale educational policy such as UPE requires adequate research and planning.* The Government's EPRC of 1989, analysed the problems confronting the education system in Uganda. The Government's White Paper of 1992, in response to these findings, clearly delineated: expansion without planning; inefficiencies in management; and lack of systemic planning among others, as the major weakness of previous administrations, that, needed to be addressed urgently. The language policy was also singled out as an area that needed to be reformed. Unfortunately, my study concluded that the sudden launch of the UPE in 1997 through the 'big bang' reversed the quality gains of Primary education. This policy, was introduced without adequate financial

resources or planning, causing a decline in quality and undermining the teaching profession, thereby overturning the gains and recommendations of the Education White Paper of 1992. My findings also support Namarome's thesis (1995) of Mbale district in East Uganda, where she warned that the conditions were not conducive for the introduction of UPE because of a lack of teachers and classroom blocks. My conclusion thus supports: local people's views and from the fieldwork data, the 1992 White Paper recommendation for proper planning and the incremental and gradual elimination of fees. The thesis also concludes that, cash subsidies and targeted support to poor children who cannot afford the numerous costs related to accessing UPE, is essential in reducing poverty and inequality and is needed to ensure that each girl and boy is prepared for lifelong learning and livelihood for, this policy to work.

iv. Language policies need to be sensitive and inclusive in order to address inequalities in terms of access for minority linguistic speakers in diverse and multi-cultural schools and classrooms. This thesis concludes that many urban areas, towns, and Kampala city are ethnically and linguistically diverse. Therefore, it is an erroneous policy for the Ministry of Education and Sports to approve only English and ten dominant 'regional' languages for Government funding, while paying lip service to over 45 minority language groups. Johnson and Beinart (2008:27) argue that: '[a]s many African countries are highly multi-lingual, a critical aspect of language policy is language selection'. The 1992 White Paper provided an outline for an equitable approach to the language question, by identifying a neutral national language, Kiswahili, as the language to promote, to deepen intercultural, national and regional communication, alongside the official language, English, and local languages or mother tongue, for safeguarding cultural heritage. Unfortunately, as Chambers (2000) argues, policy makers can decide to go slow, delay, or simply do nothing. By selecting and designating ten dominant languages for financial support, the thematic curriculum has mis-interpreted the spirit of the 1992 White Paper. The thematic curriculum is bound to entrench the hegemony of the dominant groups, and undermine the promotion of the national language. It is suggested that, the Ministry of Education should revisit the thematic curriculum, through an unbiased and subjective reading of the recommendations on language policy in the 1992 White Paper, in the spirit of equity and inclusiveness.

v. *Engagement with communities can improve access and community participation.* Commentators like Chambers and Mayoux cited in Preece (2006:208) point out that for local people, local knowledge is more useful for community analysis than ‘official’ information’. Unfortunately, as Foucault (in Sara Mills, 2003) asserted, and as my study concluded, the control of the systems that produce, distribute as well as utilise knowledge, represents power control and its distribution at the periphery. For example, the introduction of the UPE in January 1997 was top-down. Dauda (2004:32) observed that PTAs and SMCs were the first to go under UPE and ‘[t]here is a good reason why the Government has partially restored the participation of PTAs under UPE’, because without support from the parents, schools could come to a standstill. My findings support Muhumuza’s (2007:36) observation, that: ‘[c]ommunities participate more effectively through their local and voluntary associations, which are characterised by relationships driven by cooperation and mutual benefit’. The local people’s proposal that we should ensure community participation at all the levels, from the design to implementation, to make UPE and poverty initiatives more meaningful, relate rather well to my findings.

vi. *The teaching-learning environment, especially for disadvantaged children in the remote and deprived areas, needs to be improved.* UNESCO (2008:12) observes that: ‘[a] poor learning environment can exacerbate social disparities’. Therefore, creating effective learning environments including adequate facilities, well-trained teachers who motivate students and relevant curricula and clearly identified learning outcomes among others are considered key ingredients of ‘effective’ schools (Creemers 1997; Reynolds *et al.*, 2002 cited in UNESCO 2008:42). Furthermore, UNESCO (2008:42) observes that: ‘[t]he path towards Education for All starts long before Primary school. Adequate nutrition, good health and an emotionally secure, language-rich home environment during the earliest years are vital for later success in education and life’. UNESCO (2010:7) notes that:

In many developing countries, including in sub-Saharan Africa, differences in performances across schools are linked to the *teaching environment* often marked by large variations in class size, availability of text books and teaching materials, teacher quality and school standards.

My findings suggest that children in the villages and the poorer regions and rural districts lack the facilities and resources for child friendly spaces. A World Bank Study (2006) concluded, and my field work reinforced the findings, that quality education is absent from most Ugandan villages because of the absence of an effective or conducive learning environment. Coercing children to attend the poorly equipped and under-resourced schools, on hungry stomachs, in rags for uniform, and to be taught by under-motivated and uninterested teachers, will not make them learn. The SACMEQ study provided two policy suggestions (4.2 and 5.5) to address these two issues: the construction of teachers' houses and the construction of classrooms to improve the teaching-learning environment.

SACMEQ II (2005:81) Policy Suggestion 4.2: The Ministry of Education and Sports through the Department of Education Planning should increase the percentage of school facilities grant allocation to the construction of teachers' houses. The provision of teacher housing should be one of the long-term goals in the Mid-Term Budget Framework (MTBF).

SACMEQ II (2005:130) Policy Suggestion 5.5: The Education Planning Department should, in collaboration with other ministries, communities, local authorities and other stakeholders, formulate and implement plans for reducing overcrowding in classrooms through the construction of additional classrooms in targeted regions and schools.

Clearly there are more innovative strategies and multiple ways in which the teaching-learning environment could be improved, beyond the construction of school infrastructure and facilities. Intensifying focus on removing barriers to guarantee educational opportunities also mean supporting strategies to improve the teaching-learning process.

6.6.1 Implications

A broad range of suggestions were given to deal with the shortcomings of UPE and poverty reforms to improve the current approach. The national commitment of universalising Primary education by 2003, as stated in the Government's 1992 White Paper, was not attained. The international consensus to universalise Primary education and halve poverty by 2015 set by the Dakar World Education Forum, and the MDG goals set in New York of which Uganda was a signatory, may record yet another failure unless the underlying causes of education and poverty inequalities are first exposed, systematically analysed and a coordinated intervention effort by the international donor community, creditors and the Government, devised to remedy the situation. This would entail not only mobilising additional resources, but also instituting efficiency measures in the use of available government and donor resources. Similarly, the current language policy implementation is a smokescreen for other pervasive inequalities in the education system. Besides entrenching the marginalisation of linguistic minorities, it will increase tribal chauvinism and prejudice, and make it difficult for national ethos and values (including the national language) to evolve. A bottom-up, rather than top-down, approach would provide more credible impacts. Universalising Primary education will not rely simply on how much donors' pledge, but how efficiently and effectively the resources provided are used. The teaching-learning environment could be made more conducive to learning by providing more resources for soft (e.g. teacher training) and hard (e.g. infrastructure) components. Donors, who are major players in UPE in Uganda, need to explore new ways of financing UPE, rather than predominantly through the SWAPs in the form of the direct budget support, by placing emphasis on addressing the challenges such as managing risk and leakages by incorporating performance-based approaches and measures to strengthen accountability and transparency.

6.7 Summary of the Conclusions and Implications

This thesis concluded that political expedience was the driving force behind the 1997 UPE and the poverty reduction policies in Uganda, with implications for the anti-poverty programmes and strategies which focused on quick returns rather

than on the long-term strategic goals, or in the realities of ordinary people. This approach was politically successful, to the detriment of quality, which has remained far below the required levels. There seems to be a broad consensus among policy makers and the ordinary people that, the quality of education can increase or reduce inequality, as has happened in Uganda, between the affluent South and Central and the poor North and North-East.

This Chapter of the thesis reaffirmed the view that the shortcomings of the 1997 UPE policy is blamed on the victims - pupils and teachers (as lazy, stupid, absent) or their parents (poor, ignorant, unaware of the value of education) - rather than on the institutional failures which may be to blame - an irrelevant curriculum, a language the learners don't understand, absentee teachers, and formal and informal school fees (Shaeffer 2010). The disparities in the resources per school in Uganda, resulted in the stratification according to quality, with the poorer regions, locations, and districts registering the poorest performance in the Primary education leaving examinations (PLE). Therefore, the claims that UPE is benefiting the poorest most (Deininger 2003) or that UPE is reducing inequalities may need to be revised in light of the new data. Also, rather than 'blaming the victims' we should begin to ask how and why the UPE policy is failing poor children, instead of how poor children are failing under UPE (Shaeffer 2010). The consequences of inaction will be the perpetuation of regional poverty and educational inequalities. The Government has made some progress in this regard but, much more needs to be done.

This study was conducted in the period when Uganda's Universal Primary Education policy had been implemented for over a decade, with dramatic transition, and a surge in enrolment. It is widely agreed that: '[e]ducation is the most powerful determinant of inequality in Uganda' (MFPED 2004:20). Uganda has made significant steps in tackling inequality by launching targeted projects and reforms during the implementation of the UPE policy with special initiatives directed to the disadvantaged regions, and groups; however, the impacts are still limited. This Chapter has presented some suggestions by local people for tackling the persistent inequalities under the UPE policy. It also presented the corresponding and applicable suggestions for policy action given by SACMEQ II (2005) which are used in this thesis to validate the findings of the fieldwork. These suggestions are not exhaustive nor do they provide a magic wand. They

are simply some of the essential ingredients and preconditions for successful poverty reduction strategies under the UPE policy implementation. Overall, the conclusion of this thesis indicates that properly designed, meaningful, targeted action to reduce regional poverty and educational inequality is needed. Only when the poor, especially in the marginalised regions in the wider North, who have experienced over 20-years of civil war and instability can reap the benefits of the return of peace, or when the disadvantages related to - place of residence, gender, disability, or ethnolinguistic background are addressed with the distribution of free UPE and the anti-poverty initiatives on an equitable basis, will the country move closer to a broader social, economic, security, political, cultural and sustainable peace.

In the next and final Chapter 7, I will draw together and make critical reflections of this study as a whole, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses - of its methodology in particular. I will also point to the advantages of an equity-focused approach to regional inequalities and suggest opportunities for future research.

7 REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Action without reflection is no use (Lalage Bown 2008)¹⁵.

7.1 Introduction

This final Chapter of this thesis is self-reflexive about the methodological and theoretical implications of the fieldwork. I began this study by asking whether or not the 1997 UPE policy had eradicated regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda with evidence from the past decade (1997-2007) of the implementation of UPE reforms. The overall purpose was to explore the nature of the inequalities and to seek ways how these inequalities could be eliminated so as to empower people and advance the emancipatory ideals. This explanation seems worthwhile, given the fact that equity is a long standing issue, and a core objective of the 1997 UPE policy.

Drawing on my reflections on the processes and procedures that carried through this thesis, starting from the data collected from the multiple field methods such as field notes, interviews and participatory approaches and focus groups, this final Chapter highlights the different (mis)conceptions of poverty and UPE. I point out that there is “no right way” to conduct qualitative research which holds the analysis of policy implementation as one of its aims. Critical ethnography, social constructionist and the emancipatory paradigms adopted for this thesis are not the panacea to addressing the problems of poverty and educational inequalities. They are just three, among the many forms of qualitative research. Despite their limitations, these approaches increased awareness of the contradictions, and the distorted and hidden everyday understandings of inequalities, by providing an alternative to the dominant discourses about UPE, thereby directing attention to the possibilities of social emancipation in our communities and societies at large.

Equity is a common thread that runs through this thesis. Chapter 1 was devoted to an introduction of regional inequalities, preceded by Chapter 2, which presented the contemporary knowledge on inequalities through a review of the literature and the current theory. Chapter 3, described the methodology which

provided a guide for the methods and the theoretical approaches adopted for this study. Chapter 4, presented the findings of the one-year field based, firsthand, naturalistic study. Chapter 5, analysed the field data and the findings which were broken down into categories and five key themes. Chapter 6, presented the conclusions and implications, which draw on a wide range of evidence and improved knowledge in this area of scholarship. As a means of concluding this thesis, Chapter 7 presents in a little detail my reflections on the challenge of eliminating regional poverty and education inequality and the strengths and weaknesses arising from this study, as well as the lessons learned and how an equity-focused approach could contribute to the elimination of regional inequalities and accelerate progress towards the education for all, the millennium development goals and the national commitments. This Chapter also points to the opportunities for future areas of research.

In the next section, I reflect and examine myself as the point of reference, followed by the nature of the data collected and the process of data analysis.

7.1.1 Researcher as a Point of Self-Reference

In the context of critical approaches, reflexivity at its most obvious level refers to the ways in which the research participants are engaged in the research and how the process (methodology) of doing research affects the person doing it. The central issue in this study as pertains to reflexivity was whether the results of the research are artefacts of my presence, process, participation and personality, in relation to my position in the structure of power in the field, considering that critical ethnography explicitly assumes that cultures are positioned unequally in power relations (TESOL 2007). The wide array of contradictions, ethical questions, methodological considerations, and political allegiances were all intertwined, so that it is impossible to divorce the study from the researcher. It was necessary to bear in mind why I chose the topic (UPE, poverty and regional inequality), the three distinct field sites or settings (urban, peri-urban or rural), the theoretical stance (critical ethnography, social construction, and emancipatory paradigms) I adopted, and my position as a researcher vis a vis the researched (in relation to power, authority, control etc.).

Essentially, I positioned the study epistemologically within the critical approaches. I was convinced that through inter-subjectivity, I would make the connection between the policy, theory and practice to unearth the dominant social constructions and truth so as to enhance the emancipatory value of this study. This conceptual approach greatly influenced my theoretical approach, design and methods and methodology, as is reflected in the nature and the analysis of the data, discussed next.

7.1.2 The Nature of the Data and Process of Data Analysis

Cookson (1994:116) observes that: '[a]s in most research, it is methodologically unsound to rely upon only one source of information when collecting data'. In this thesis, I used multiple methods to generate rich and diverse forms of data with the emphasis given to participants' perspectives and understandings. My direct involvement in the one-year field study generated descriptive accounts of how the everyday and sometimes mundane practices of those engaged in educational processes are implicated in social reproduction of social inequalities. In this regard, I drew on the critical interviews, participatory approaches, informal conversations, and the critical reading of reports and secondary sources, for their accuracy and inaccuracy. This critical ethnographic data is socially constructed for emancipatory value, yet this same data could be conceived differently by different audiences. For instance, quantitatively based studies, compared to the qualitative approaches with different emphasis depending on the theoretical frameworks, can generate different findings (Creswell, 2005). The nature of the data and the approaches adopted in the analysis for this thesis were critical and therefore empowering.

The process of the analysis was led by the content of the data and the theoretical and epistemological frameworks described in Chapter 3. I undertook a diligent approach to the data analysis of the core issues, using an integrated approach to enhance the understanding of inequality while engaging in reflexivity as a means of substantiating the interpretations and findings. The participation of the un-influential village school drop-outs, young primary graduates and local people, as well as adults concerned with this UPE policy was enhanced, through the adoption of the emancipatory approaches, which gave a voice to these less powerful people through the dialogical interviews. These

approaches inspired the study participants, as they voiced their fears, frustrations and aspirations with confidence that for the first time, someone was listening to their views and their views were at least important. The knowledge claims were analysed taking heed of the social structures, injustices and cultural ideologies that are taken for granted in the dominant discourses. The result was the generation of new knowledge of the policy context, but also a better understanding of the challenge of eliminating inequalities, described next.

7.2 The Challenge of Eliminating Regional Poverty and Educational Inequalities

Uganda has made tremendous efforts towards achieving universal primary and lower secondary education. However, many challenges still exist, negatively affecting millions of children and youths. The data in this thesis suggested that the persistent inequalities between and within regions in poverty and educational indicators are not coincidental: The causes are historical in nature, fomented by the growing political, social and economic inequalities. They also mirror the inequalities in income during the 1990s, and into the early 21st century between the groups and regions (Appleton 2003, 2009; UNDP 2007; Mukwaya *et al.*, 2008). Although it is noted by some writers that the UPE policy has benefited the poor and girls from the poorest quintiles most (Deininger, 2003), other writers argued that this national policy may have benefitted the privileged children living in the affluent regions (Zuze 2008) as their parents are able to supplement or afford the numerous costs associated with accessing 'free' UPE, often as a result of their better family background, socio-economic status and political clout.

This study reaffirmed that children from poor households whose parents have less education were likely to remain poor. UPE is thus confirming power relations and entrenching regional poverty and educational inequalities. Hoppers, confirms this analysis, noting that: '[c]hildren who do not attend school or who drop out at an early stage are overwhelmingly from poor backgrounds' (2004:38). In Uganda, it is these disadvantaged children living in the poor deprived and impoverished geographic regions, who all along expected that the 1997 UPE policy would guarantee their full access, participation and completion

with good pedagogical results and allow them to progress to post-primary, tertiary education and into the labour market, since education is viewed as the quickest route out of poverty.

Therefore, the UPE policy reforms of 1997 seem to be playing an active role in maintaining the status quo by giving the appearance of change and so legitimatising inequalities. Policymakers are unable or unwilling to contradict powerful people i.e. the UPE policy is associated with president Museveni (McGee 2000; Muhumuza 2007; Zuze 2008). As such, the serious shortcomings of UPE, such as the persistence of regional disparities in academic attainments, or in the inequalities between regions, or among different socio-economic groups are under-emphasised. UNESCO (2010:12) strikes a note of hope arguing that, '[t]he inequalities that the marginalised face are persistent and resistant to change, yet progress is possible with sustained political commitment to social justice, equal opportunity and basic rights'. A sustained push for an equity focus, as will be discussed later, stems from this realisation of UPE as a double edged sword. From my analysis it is clear that much more fieldwork, oriented toward this question, is necessary for a viable solution to be realised. The critical approaches adopted for this thesis provide an opportunity for a deeper scrutiny and reflection, of the 1997 UPE policy.

This study on its own cannot solve the persistent and resilient regional inequalities in the country. Moreover, only limited generalisations are warranted from this study as there are limitations, such as scope and methodology, as well as limited financial resources, human resources, or the time to implement policy decisions of the proposed policy suggestions outlined in these empirical studies (SACMEQ II, 2005). It is therefore important, to review the strengths and weaknesses of the processes of this study, in order to identify areas for action, and to contribute to reducing inequities and inequalities, which is the aim of this investigation. This discussion is given next.

7.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

This final Chapter provides reflective and better-informed knowledge about all elements that were developed in this study by determining where the shortcomings of the UPE policy occurred in the results chain. By benchmarking

progress through a comparative study between regions, the thesis highlighted the areas of strength and weakness. This is particularly critical as, regional educational inequalities are often silent in dominant discourse, making it important for such an investigation to make clear reference to inclusiveness and equity to enable a more accurate response to the needs of the underserved or excluded children, youths and adults. This clear framework, outlined in this section, calls for additional information or insights into the different challenges facing poor and disadvantaged people and regions in order to tackle disparities and reach equitable learning outcomes in UPE. These are outlined below, starting with the strengths.

7.3.1 Strengths

The strength of this thesis is that it offers unique data, bringing the voices of a group of people who have been silent in the UPE policy debate, through naturalistic and emancipatory approaches to the field based study. My cultural heritage is from the education site in the village. This meant that I had adequate self-awareness and was self-conscious of the cultural nuances without worrying about, for instance, learning the local language, or having to familiarise myself with an overly strange fieldwork setting. This enabled me to obtain a reflexive stance from a vantage point, as I was able to identify the biases and values of participants while differentiating the participants' views from mine.

The village catechist was my host, something that greatly facilitated access. Also very reassuring, was that the elders who participated in the focus groups referred to me as their 'child' literally. They saw me as someone who could provide a 'voice' on their behalf. We interacted easily without any suspicion or mistrust as they freely revealed their fears, frustrations, and hopes. This confidence of the elders in me, and the prolonged stay at the site, coupled with the openness of the ordinary people enhanced the authenticity and genuineness of the findings, supported by the analysis which was well grounded in the empirical and theoretical material.

The use of the second project of the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ II) data, which contains extensive secondary data on the education systems in Uganda, collected during 2000-2002 on large scale

samples of Grade 6 students on the reading literacy and numeracy as described in the earlier Chapters, were crucial to validating the claims made in this thesis. The SACMEQ II (2005) data related to the Ugandan context, made it possible to highlight the success of the system and the areas that need improvement. Data from various international student assessments such as PISA (2009), generally highlight the widespread under-achievement in less developed countries, with students from rural areas being particularly vulnerable (UNESCO 2004). The equity, Chapter 7, of the SACMEQ II (2005) study thus provided the basic data set to address the equity concern and the research problem in this thesis.

The findings in this thesis confirmed that, ‘the Ministry of Education and Sports has accumulated vast experience over many years of providing education services and managing educational reform’ (SACMEQ II 2005:190). In any case, the SACMEQ II (2005:189) study for Uganda noted that:

All education systems have established ways of dealing with problems, and efforts should be made to ensure that the established structures, systems and procedures contribute to the solution of the problems identified.

It is important then for the Ministry of Education and Sports to remain firmly in the driver’s seat, in order to accomplish its vision and mission to eliminate inequities and inequalities in the education system identified in this thesis as a persistent policy concern.

The strengths of this integrated approach, in my view, was its capacity to offer accounts of the multidimensionality of poverty and its effects on educational inequality under UPE from the perspectives of these less powerful and un-influential participants who are often ignored in the dominant official discourse. Further, the conceptual, theoretical and epistemological approach allowed me to engage in issues that go beyond the education settings to the broader structural issues in society. This allowed me to view UPE not only in isolation, but as part of the broader social, economic and political context under which inequality manifests itself, while using the detail of the distinctive education contexts in the country.

In summary this study has advanced a valuable and an authentic experience in educational and poverty inequalities. However, it is necessary to recognise the weaknesses of this study so as to assure credibility and underscore a realistic impact of this thesis on the UPE policy reforms. I wanted to ensure that the claims that were made about this integrated approach, in the findings, analysis, conclusions and implications of these empirical approaches and new knowledge are realistic. This provided the scope for reflections on the weaknesses, which are acknowledged next.

7.3.2 Weaknesses

A conscious distinction had to be drawn between my two roles during the fieldwork, notably as a guest and as a researcher, and also to adjust the study to suit the practicalities of the fieldwork and the time constraints. It would have been futile to impose my pre-planned, highly organised schedule during my one-year stay in Uganda. This meant that delays were inevitable, sometimes, with elements of chaos and some imponderables. This is the nature of naturalistic investigations that researchers need to adjust to in order to get credible data.

My familiarity with the social context, in a sense, was a shortcoming for the critical ethnography in the fashion typified by the late 19th century and early 20th century anthropologists like Malinowski (1922), cited by Pole and Morison (2003), where the researchers explored 'primitive' cultures by visiting other countries and became immersed in these alien societies for extensive periods, so that they could write an 'objective' account of what they saw and heard. The research context in Uganda or in the village was not entirely strange since I was able to relate to the cultural nuances, prior to and after embarking on this research.

The study was also limited by the small sample size (typical in ethnographies), which means that the data may not be nationally representative. For example, the Northern and North-Eastern regions of Uganda were more adversely affected by conflict, insecurity, poverty and marginalisation. By 2006, the country had registered some 2 million people living in Internally Displaced Peoples camps, mostly in the North and North-East (Owomoyela 2006). Although the camps are now closed, and communities supported in early recovery through the

government-led Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (GoU 2007), poverty is rife in these regions, and those returning home after over two decades of living in the squalid conditions in IDP camps, have to come to terms with the loss of their material assets, and the extreme deprivation they find themselves in. Poor educational outcomes and poverty inequalities in these areas are likely to be higher than the rest of the country.

The lack of a complete set of comparable statistical data for the decade of implementation (1997-2007) of the 1997 UPE policy, was a major weakness of this study. My analysis was based on the qualitative data collected during the one-year fieldwork in Uganda for the UPE graduates for the cohorts, 1997-2007, and the SACMEQ II (2005) data for grade 6 pupils, generated during 2000-2002. The data was scanty or not readily available. The data was also silent on the disparities between districts, regions or ethnic groups, or between other social groups, disaggregated according to the factors that exclude them. Judging from the fact that inequalities by their very nature are a 'subject of controversy' (UNESCO 1980, 2009), it is possible that data that reveals inequality between these groups might be hard to obtain.

In sum, the strengths of this thesis outweigh the weaknesses. Nonetheless, we cannot ignore these and other limitations outlined here. Therefore, although critical ethnographic, social constructionist, and emancipatory approaches are capable of resonating beyond a specific case, there is a need to be cautious about the generalisation of the conclusions and policy implications drawn from the findings in all parts of the country. While making a case for this integrated approach, it is necessary that such an understanding on the regional poverty and educational inequalities be clearly articulated. I make a case and reflect on an equity focused approach next, followed by lessons learned from the past decade of implementation, not only to refocus on policies to make UPE equitable, but also to counter the shortcomings of the UPE policy approach.

7.4 Equity Focused Approach to Regional Inequalities

The concern for an equity focus to the regional inequalities stems from the simple observation that education systems do not serve all learners in the same way (Burnett 2009). Although muted in the policy discourse, regional inequity is

a persistent policy concern that has gained prominence in the past decade in Uganda. Overall, widening participation has allowed poor households to gain increased access, yet the wider North still had the lowest proportion of primary school-age children attending primary school (74 per cent) and Karamoja, classified as a sub-population of the Northern region, has a net attendance ratio of only 43 per cent. Academic under-achievement at the end of the primary school cycle, were worst in the peripheral districts and the wider Northern regions in particular. The conflict and a multiplicity of poverty related problems are explanatory factors (World Bank 2008:56). Therefore, the geographical North faces comparatively, the worst education and poverty indicators, in contrast with the relatively more advantaged Central and South-Western regions.

A special UNICEF Report, *Narrowing the gaps to meet the goals* (2010), arrived at a 'significant' conclusion that, an equity based strategy can move us quickly and cost effectively towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals. This Report argues that, an equity focused approach can forcefully be made using the moral and economic argument, because it is the right principle, it is strategically sound, and it is also right in practice. With reference to this thesis, the multi-dimensionality of inequalities and its underlying causes makes it extremely difficult for the government to effectively formulate and finance the needed multi-sectoral policies to respond to the specificity of the needs of the most vulnerable populations. An equity focus therefore offers the opportunity to tackle the persistent educational and poverty inequalities. But even in Uganda, in a context where universal primary education was declared over a decade ago, with the ultimate goal to eliminate inequity and disparities, there are major equity problems faced by population groups such as low-income groups, girls, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and other disadvantages related to place of residence or geographic location.

The persistence of inequities as described, and the current context where many Ugandan children and youths are leaving school without the knowledge, skills and competencies that are needed to thrive in the global economy, make it necessary to revisit the 1997 UPE reforms and the lessons learned from implementing these reforms in the past decade.

Lessons Learned from the Past Decade of UPE Implementation

If we are to go by the deficiencies in the learning achievement, experienced in the past decade of UPE implementation, achieving equitable and quality learning outcomes in Uganda will be a challenging and an uncertain mission, due to the persistence of inequalities between and within regions, yet improvements can be realised quickly by adopting an equity-focused strategy. This next section describes in summary form, reflections on the key barriers to the UPE reforms in order to distil the lessons learned, and focus on equity in education; the following section then outlines directions for future research.

i. **Drop-out:** The high drop-out rate especially in the deprived geographically remote regions is a major threat that cannot be wished away. The MoES reports are socially constructed to suggest that drop-out is caused by ‘lack of interest’ and the blame is heaped on the victims (pupils, their parents and in some cases the teachers). The analysis in Chapter 5 and Chapters 6, and the discussion on the theme of *Powerlessness* and the *Enduring faith* in education goes deep into this socially constructed idea, unearthing an interesting finding, that the perceived poor quality and relevance of UPE to the labour market, directly correlated to the lack of interest in UPE, rather than on the intrinsic benefits of education *per se*, is based, on a flawed premise. The euphoria generated at the introduction of UPE quickly turned into cynicism, dampening spirits among local poor people, when they realised that UPE did not mean cost-free education. UNICEF and UNESCO (2010:7) observe that, these children who drop out-of-school ‘often face deep-rooted structural inequalities and disparities linked to income-poverty, exposure to child labour, conflict and natural disasters, location (urban or rural area, geographic sub-national regions), gender, HIV and AIDS, disability, ethnicity, language, and religion’. These structural barriers to schooling place the country at risk of not reaching the 2015 MDG 2 (universal primary education) and MDG 3 (gender parity in primary and secondary education).

ii. **Rural-urban disparities:** Schools in urban areas (private and also public UPE) perform much better in national examinations compared to UPE schools in rural areas (Bategeka, 2005). It is evident that urban schools are concentrated in specific sub-regions notably in Central and South-Western Uganda (Kasirye,

2009), and the parents' expenditure per pupil, in these urban schools is much higher than in rural areas. For example, Kasirye (2009) notes that in 2000, expenditure per pupil in the capital city Kampala was US\$63, compared to only US\$10 in the remote and poorest Northern district of Kotido. The differences reflect the disparities in the parental income levels. In rural areas, where the majority of the poor reside, the contribution of parents is almost zero, introducing further inequity in terms of total resources per pupil (Bategeka, 2005). This thesis also points to the urban poor, who we should not lose focus of. Stromquist (2007), writing on the Latin American perspective, observes that education generates a dislike for rural life and a lack of fit in it, and drives people to urban areas. Ironically, in their quest for a better life, it is these rural poor who are forced to live in squalid conditions and are equally disadvantaged due to the pressures associated with living in the urban slums.

iii. **'Dominant' languages:** The selection of 'dominant' languages as the languages of instruction, (or taught as a subject) in multicultural and metropolitan areas, rather than the use of the mother tongue for each child (to safeguard their linguistic rights) or the national language - Kiswahili, under the thematic curriculum, has privileged majority groups. Although the language policy under the thematic curriculum is intended to allow the early-years of education in the pupils' mother-tongue, this language policy is undermining equality of access, as speakers from minority ethnolinguistic communities are facing a kind of social stigma that, their mother tongue is inferior to the dominant languages because minority languages are not taught to minority language speakers in cosmopolitan areas. These minority languages are excluded on account that they do not have orthographies or lack teachers (in the case of Kiswahili) - (Altinyelken 2009). The equity focused approach in education calls for inclusive policies that address the diverse needs of student populations and take into account factors such as poverty, language and location (UNESCO 2010).

iv. **Achieving equity:** Equitable learning outcomes in UPE could be reached by distributing educational opportunities fairly and inclusively to the entire population, across districts and between and within the regions. The strategies for achieving this goal could be adapted from UNICEF's (2010) approach which proposes three strategies with application for the Uganda context: *First*, is an upgrade of school facilities. In the case of Uganda, this would mean an upgrade

or focus on the poor schools (Grade IV) so as to uplift their status, academic and infrastructural, to match Grade I, or bring them closer to this Grade so that children in these 'third world schools' could compete on an equitable standing with their more advantaged peers in the 'first world schools'; *Second*, is to overcome barriers that prevent the poorest of the poor from using facilities, even when they are available to them. The elimination of fees, increase in teacher numbers, classrooms blocks and funding levels are given as an example of a successful policy. However, the equity approach proposes a step further, to extend cash transfers to the poorest to cover subsistence and other indirect costs known to prevent these disadvantaged groups from utilising services (UNESCO 2010). *Third*, measures that involve the greater use of the community education committees who understand the barriers and the bottlenecks of delivering UPE by the Government in the villages, and the poor remote geographical areas, should be explored. Equitable targeting of the regions where excluded groups live is the easier way of realising the goal of universalisation of primary education. Enhanced community involvement to promote schooling is one way to reach this goal.

v. ***Universalised approach to UPE***: The current universalised approach of UPE delivery lends significant, but less focused attention to the marginalised groups and regions (Higgins 2009). The universal policies which benefit everyone may not be the best strategy where there are extreme inequalities between and within groups. Despite a decade of reforms, the emerging data reveals that the worst poverty and education indicators are concentrated in the regionally deprived and marginalised areas in the North and North-Eastern. Likewise, the targeted UPE policies and special measures, to these geographical regions have not brought parity, suggesting a failure to translate the equity language of policy to equitable service outputs or outcomes. This thesis has pointed to political and ideological issues such as regionalism, governance and accountability, as factors that are impeding access to equal opportunities for all regions and communities despite the rhetoric. UPE reforms could thus be confirming power imbalances in Uganda starting in the early years of education which is critical for giving foundational literacy and numeracy on which lifelong learning depends (World Bank 2011). There is a need to refocus on the most disadvantaged children - poorest, excluded, and discriminated groups in order to interrupt the perpetuation of inter-generational cycles of deprivations.

Equity is a virtue. Equity presupposes treating all people justly and fairly. Equity does not mean that all must be treated exactly the same, or in the case of UPE, that all learners must obtain precise outcomes. The policy should however be inclusive, fair and just, so that the overall benefits and gains reach the entire population, because when the demand for quality UPE cannot be satisfied, disadvantaged regions and underrepresented groups stand to lose (World Bank 2011). Application of well thought out equity focused interventions could have a high impact on addressing the underlying causes of under achievement and poor academic outcomes among the poor in these marginalised geographic regions. The doctrine of equitable development should thus inform policy and planning and be at the centre of future directions of research. I will discuss this next.

7.5 Directions for Future Areas of Research

A well-functioning education system will have policies or programmes that specifically address the disadvantages faced by population groups (e.g. low-income groups, ethnolinguistic minorities, people with disabilities, and girls) and target special resources to assist these disadvantaged groups (World Bank 2011). With equity as a continuous concern on policy agendas, this thesis opens several avenues for further research for policy makers, to formulate coherent and effective policies to redress inequalities. Chief among them will be to focus efforts in five strategic directions: collecting and analysing disaggregated, longitudinal, and statistical data; examining the mode of delivery best suited to reach the unreached; examining the impact of the thematic curriculum language policy; investigating the high attrition rates attributed to teachers; and clarifying the meaning of UPE from the equity perspective. These strategic directions for future areas of inquiry are elaborated as follows:

i. Making the invisible visible by gathering robust information of the learning outcomes for the pioneer students of the UPE policy, who joined P1 in 1997, and completed the seven year cycle in 2003, and the subsequent cohorts across all regions in the country, disaggregated by gender, population/ethnic groups, disability, region, and other features associated with exclusion. The current data is largely based on national averages which can conceal the broad and widening regional disparities in poverty and education inequities. Wils *et. al.*, (2005) observe that the present focus on a limited group of indicators to measure flows

(such as intake rates, primary school completion rates, survival, and test scores) can provide an incomplete picture of reality. Currently, there is no systematic analysis of data generated by UNEB, Uganda's sole examining body, to indicate the high levels of disparities that exist between and within regions or across different population groups since the launching of the UPE policy in 1997. The use of educational attainment indicators, are a better measure of educational outcomes, and therefore, such research will generate relevant data to help determine the extent of the inequities under UPE and identify those factors that exclude them so as to design equitable solutions.

The other related issue is the intergenerational transmission of poverty that UPE seems to be reinforcing. Kotani (2004:10) citing Birdcall *et al.*, (1996), observes that:

Although education is expected to generate intergenerational mobility, children from low-income families tend to lack access to quality schools and do not proceed to higher levels of schooling.

It is the case that, '[r]esearch conducted in several developed countries reveals that students from formerly disadvantaged backgrounds tend to concentrate on short-cycle professional higher education' (Groenez *et al.*, 2003: Martins *et al.* 2005 cited in Martins 2010b:27), as these programmes provide easier access to higher education, and sometimes when pathways exist, entry into full time programmes. This seems to be the case in the less developed and the developing countries. Therefore, a longitudinal study on the cumulative and cross generational effects of UPE would provide a detailed analysis of the differences over time as well as the qualifications and skills attained for all who entered UPE in 1997 and the subsequent cohorts, so that we can see how small or how large the disparities are and how they are changing, or vary over the course of UPE and beyond, for better informed policy action.

ii. Research the right approach to meet the education aspirations of the disadvantaged 15 per cent school-age out-of-school children and youths and those who are most at risk of dropping out of school. It is estimated that only 22 per cent of the 1997 UPE pioneers completed the 7-year primary cycle, with less than 1 per cent of the pioneer students joining tertiary education. The key

question to ask is: is the formal UPE model the right approach to meet the education aspirations of the disadvantaged children and youths or could we adopt a more holistic approach for those most likely to be excluded from the formal education system? Future research could explore the type of education that has the potential to provide disadvantaged out-of-school children, youth and adults, with quality education and an equal opportunity, by developing support systems and programmes which promote the inclusion of these groups. Such an approach could impart the right knowledge, attitudes and skills, to participate in the labour market and enhance prospects of future earnings regardless of socio-economic status, family background, or type of schooling (private, public, formal, non-formal or alternative learning).

iii. Study the impact of the language policy implemented through the thematic curriculum in the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic classrooms. The assumption that teaching in mother tongue through the thematic curriculum will result in improved learning, particularly in the context of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural classrooms in cosmopolitan areas is misplaced, given, my evidence. Instead, the opposite may occur as it is not possible to teach several mother tongues in the same school, in the same classrooms. Ethnolinguistic minorities stand to be further marginalised by the decision of the Ministry of Education and Sports to support teaching in ‘dominant’ languages in urban areas. Future research needs to investigate the effects of exclusion of minority groups (on their linguistic rights) under the thematic curriculum, especially in urban areas on account of lack of orthographies, personnel, or funds for the teaching of languages other than the ten dominant languages and the long-term effects of this policy for social cohesion in a plural society like Uganda, or in the promotion of the national language, Kiswahili, as English is already compulsory, and taught as a subject in all Ugandan schools. Future research should be conducted to understand whether the national language policy is known and understood and has been disseminated to all those concerned with language education, language use, and language development in view of the relationship between languages and education and the long-term implications for national unity and national integration.

iv. **Investigate the high attrition rates and the attribution of poor quality of UPE to teachers.** UNICEF (2011) notes that education outcomes for children, in particular the most disadvantaged depend on teachers. Teacher factors such as: teacher absenteeism, teacher drunkenness, high pupil-teacher ratios, teachers' over reliance on past papers, failure to complete the syllabus, and weak inspection among other matters, are given to justify under-achievement in terminal primary examinations. There were 124,595 qualified teachers in Uganda on payroll in 2008/2009, a decrease from 126,325 in 2007/2008. Unqualified teachers reduced by 21.9 per cent (i.e. from 10,127 in 2007/2008 to 7,909 in 2008/2009) (MoES 2009). The data indicates that, the majority of the unqualified teachers are deployed in UPE schools in rural areas (Bategeka 2005). This thesis recognises the Governments' effort to increase the pool of teachers. However, the actual teacher numbers do not translate to presence in the classroom, considering the high levels of absenteeism and the existence of 'ghost' teachers etc. There are also issues that affect teacher quality such as recruitment, retention, professional development, and employment and teaching conditions (UNICEF 2011). Future research needs to investigate these phenomena, and the role of teachers in the academic attainment of pupils especially in the worst performing districts and regions. Research on promoting governance and accountability in the education systems to assure efficient use of resources so as to provide quality education and better learning outcomes to the disadvantaged and marginalised groups should be conducted.

v. **Clarify the meaning of UPE from the equity-focused approach in view of the differences in perception about UPE in Uganda.** The awareness of the moral rights to UPE for those who are not in school or excluded by the UPE policy is the first step to their emancipation and asserting their legal right to education. But first, further assessment is required of the definition of what fee-free education entails, and to investigate how each child, young person and adult can be granted their inalienable right to education regardless of whether they are poor or not. This research could clarify how the financial barriers and numerous costs related to school attendance like uniform, meals, examination costs and informal fees for school activities which are prohibitive for many Ugandan households especially in the peripheral and regionally deprived areas could be lowered or eliminated. Future research therefore needs to examine the notion of *equity* in access, participation and outcomes to see through, the policy

promulgations and the implications for poor children, youths and adults so that the right to free-compulsory basic education is protected.

This thesis singled out the aforementioned five areas as the concerns and issues where there are key data analysis and policy gaps. There is a need to acquire a better overview of the data to measure the scope of equity and describe the complexity of inequalities and disparities in academic attainment to inform policy planning if the objectives of the 1997 UPE policy are to be met. However, the key questions, that will guide future research, should be assessed on how relevant, how representative, and how reliable and well-founded theoretically and empirically the policies are for real change to happen.

7.6 Final Remarks

The findings of this thesis do not allow me to attribute the poverty and the regional educational inequalities on any one particular factor. My research remains tentative and inconclusive, like most academic endeavours, leading to new questions to answer how poverty and education disparities influence the regional inequalities in Uganda and similar contexts in other developing nations. Likewise, research on regional inequalities is not found in one methodology or in the critical paradigms, namely critical ethnographic, social construction and emancipatory research adopted for this study. There is no need to advocate for all research to pursue these approaches. Rather, researchers need to view the larger context which gives rise to poverty and educational inequalities and develop theoretically informed research and be able to be reflective to realise the core values of equity and the inalienable right for each child, youth and adult to receive education on an equal basis. This interpretation is consistent with the 1948, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1989, United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC).

An education system, whether formal or non-formal, from preschool to tertiary education through to the labour market needs to be organised in such a way as to provide an equal opportunity to every citizen as: '[t]he distribution of educational opportunity plays a key role in shaping human development prospects' (UNESCO 2008:26). The findings of this study are significant in this regard. Higgins (2009) observes that there is a wide gulf in education

opportunities in Uganda, linked to inequalities in income, health and wider life chances. After rigorous review of literature and my field data, I unearthed observable patterns of the persistence of educational and poverty inequalities since the launching of the UPE policy in 1997. The SACMEQ II (2005) and the UNEB PLE administered examination results suggested that the most significant disparities in academic achievement are in the Northern region which is the worst performing, followed by the Eastern region. These poorer, regions (North and North-Eastern) trailed the affluent Southern (Central and Western) regions, thus underlining one challenge: regional inequalities in student achievement are likely to persist even with the return of peace, unless good or better multi-sectoral and multi-pronged policies are designed and implemented to address the specific causes of inequity and the regional inequalities, some of which are beyond the field of education.

The analytic approach employed herein concluded that, although Uganda's resources are insufficient to meet the demand for quality universal primary education, the current UPE policy falls far short of fulfilling the hope for the elimination of regional poverty and educational inequalities. Thus, whereas Uganda achieved considerable progress in UPE access and in the welfare indices through anti-poverty initiatives, the completion, academic attainments and learning outcomes remain poor for disadvantaged people, especially girls living in the rural, and the geographically remote areas, in the marginalised regions. Primary education was the penultimate level, and of strategic importance as the prerequisite for acquiring literacy and numeracy and for successful learning in other subjects and subsequent transition into post-primary and higher education. However, due to the constraints mentioned, the size and the magnitude of the problem of inequity and regional disparities in learning outcomes have not gone away.

The World Bank (2011:xiii) argues that, 'It is not enough to get the technical details right; reforms also require navigating the twin challenges of constraints on a nation's implementation capacity and its political economy'. This thesis, calls for a more inclusive, equity-focused approach that goes beyond the education services delivered through the formal system, to take advantage of the non-formal alternative and flexible learning that, are best suited for marginalised groups. This thesis also underlines that some of the barriers to

schooling are beyond those addressed in the education system, for example the bad roads, poor rural infrastructure, ineffective social services, poor health, nutritional deficiencies and shortage of hygiene, water and power supply, which all have a negative impact on education (World Bank 2011). Equitable targeting of budgetary allocations for effective poverty alleviation in Uganda should thus take into account the peculiarities and the region-specific poverty lines.

Real reforms and political commitment that will lead to equitable access and learning outcomes is the right agenda to guide the Government's education efforts as it is clear that Uganda will not reach the 2015 MDG targets 2 and 3 with equity or the six EFA goals. Carron and Châu (1980:10) argue that: '[t]he education service should be organised in such a way that everyone can benefit from it under the same conditions'. Unfortunately, as Higgins and Rwanyange (2005) point out in their study of Uganda, and as my analysis indicated, the broader goals and objectives of the Ugandan education system defined by Kajubi (GoU 1998): *Promoting a sense of national unity, economic development, social justice and equity, self-reliance and a sense of mutual responsibility - receive little attention in the discussion on progress.*

This realisation, and by extension this research, opens possibilities for these critical issues, as well as the persistent inequalities and disparities between and within regions to be scrutinised and examined through the theoretical as well as empirical knowledge generated in this thesis to advocate for disadvantaged and marginalised children, youths and adults at risk of exclusion, with a fundamental message of *praxis* for change. This is the biggest hurdle - because it will directly challenge the privilege that some people and regions in Uganda have enjoyed - but it is one challenge which is surmountable.

Endnotes

- ¹. The primary leavers were the first and subsequent cohorts of the 1997 UPE policy between 1997 to 2003 and 2001 to 2007 covering a decade of UPE implementation. They are now aged between 13 to 24. The adult participants were teachers, head teacher, education officials, local leaders, education executive committee members and religious leaders (see Appendix V).
- ² The Quality Education Initiative (QEI) is implemented in 12 poor performing districts. These are: Amuru, Arua, Bududa, Bukedea, Bulisa, Kaabong, Kyenjojo, Lyantonde, Mubende, Nakapiripirit, Nebbi, and Oyam Districts.
- ³. The Government dailies, *The New Vision* and *The Daily Monitor* have reported on several occasions, that they will arrest and detain any parent whose child drops out of school.
- ⁴. Many highly trained Ugandan professionals have left the country in search of well-paid jobs and promises of a better life. Others have left due to persecution by the state.
- ⁵. The floods that hit the regions were widely documented by the Government and humanitarian agencies.
- ⁶. I have included a summary of the Ministry of Education and Sports staff posted on the Ministry's website in appendix VII.
- ⁷. Uganda shillings 10,400/= is approximately USD\$6.
- ⁸. Hawkers selling 'buvera' polythene bags and petty items for income and for a living.
- ⁹. 'Pamphlets' are simplified notes in point form outlining facts in response to past paper questions. Pamphlets have become the major reading materials for students. The over-reliance by teachers and candidates on pamphlets is attributable to the poor performance in many analytical subjects' questions that require higher cognitive skills of application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

10. 'Eating' in Uganda is understood figuratively as stealing/misappropriation of state funds for personal benefit whether or not one is engaged in any productive work. It has reached a point where unethical behaviour by leaders does not shock most people.
11. The 'fine' is a penalty levied by the girl's parents to the boy's family for interrupting the education of their daughter, in case she drops out of school due to pregnancy or to marry.
12. The head teacher of the Municipality school told me that the Ministry wrote a memo asking school heads in rural district schools to charge Uganda shillings UGHS 5,500/= for mid day meals.
13. Used as the euphemism of non-existent person recorded in the official Ministry of Education and Sports data base.
14. A jigger flea is a parasitic arthropod found in tropical climates. Jiggers attack the feet via the bare skin causing a painful boil-like swelling. The dusty mud classroom floors typical of most village classrooms are a good breeding ground for the jigger flea and other vermin.
15. Keynote speech at the British Association for International Comparative Education Conference, Glasgow 4th September 2008.

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Appendices

Appendix I. Plain Language Statement Form



UNIVERSITY *of* GLASGOW

1. Study title and Researcher Details

Department: Department for Adult Continuing Education, Faculty of Education

project title:

'The relationship between the 1997 universal primary education (UPE) policy and poverty reduction, among the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised groups in Uganda through a social constructionist and discourse analysis of dominant poverty perspectives drawing on evidence from the past decade (1997-2007)'.

principal investigator: John Ekaju + (44) 07783013256

supervisors: Professor Julia Preece + (44) 0141 330 1839

Professor Ian Menter + (44) 0141 330 3480

degree for which the research is being undertaken: PhD in the social construction of
poor people

NB: This is a simplified version for children and parents. I propose to translate this PLS and the Consent form into Kumam language (while in Soroti prior to data collection) so as to make this information easily accessible to the children and parents in the villages.

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in this educational study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with other community members if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the 1997 UPE policy has been effective or not in reducing regional poverty and educational inequalities in Uganda using evidence from the past ten years. This study is a part of my research studies at the University of Glasgow.

4. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because your experiences on UPE and poverty are important for this study. I am proposing to interview 75 people from the village, the town and the city for comparing education in these different areas.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, I will give you this information sheet to keep and I will ask you to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

The study will take place in the: (1) village (2) town, and the (3) city schools and communities. I will spend three- months in each site, with a one-month between site visits for data analysis.

I will use (a) interviews, (b) participatory research appraisal (PRA) techniques, e.g. **focus groups discussions** (FGDs) with 2-12 participants to exchange ideas on UPE and poverty; and **social mapping** where the participants will develop a detailed representation about the social problems experienced in accessing UPE, and (c) documents, e.g. meeting notes and letters.

The meetings will last between one to two hours. I will tape record the discussions with your permission. I will also jot down some notes.

The study will take place between June 2007 to May 2008.

7. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

I will not include your name or your address in this study. I will do this so that nobody can recognise you from the information that you will give.

8. What will happen to the results of the research study?

The research report will be available at the University of Glasgow and at the district education office.

The results of this study may also be presented at a conference and published in a journal. I will not write your name or address in any report or book.

9. Who is organising and funding the research?

The University of Glasgow, Wingate Trust and myself.

10. Who has reviewed the study?

The University of Glasgow.

11. Contact(s) for Further Information

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project please contact:

Professor Julia Preece: Director of CRADALL Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning, Department of Adult And Continuing Education, University of Glasgow St Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street, Glasgow, G3 6NH: Telephone: 0141 330 1839: Email J.Preece@educ.gla.ac.uk

Professor Ian Menter: Chair of Teacher Education, Department of Curriculum Studies and Deputy Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Glasgow St Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street, Glasgow, G3 6NH: Telephone: 0141 330 3480: Email i.meter@educ.gla.ac.uk

Dr George Head: Faculty of Education Ethics Officer, Email: G.Head@educ.gla.ac.uk.

Thank you!

John Ekaju

Appendix II. Informed Consent Form



UNIVERSITY
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GLASGOW

Faculty *of* Education

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:

Name of Researcher:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. (include other clauses as relevant, e.g., consent to interviews being audio-taped, acknowledgement that copies of transcripts will be returned to participant for verification, participants to be referred to by pseudonym or identified by name in any publications arising from the research, and in instances where a dependent relationship is involved confirmation that participation or non-participation in the research will have no affect on grades/assessment/employment)

4. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of Person giving consent	Date	Signature

(if different from participant, e.g. Parent)

_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

1 for subject; 1 for researcher

Where participants are under 18 years of age, space needs to be provided for the parent/guardian to sign the consent form. For some research it may be more appropriate to develop separate consent forms for the child and the parent/guardian.

Appendix III. Interview Protocol and Field Questions

Name:

.....

School:

Contact:

Date of Interview:

Preamble:

I started with greetings and thanking the participants for accepting to talk to me. I then give an overview of my study using the PLS form: I am interested to know how far UPE has impacted on the poverty situation since it's introduced in 1997. I will inform the interviewee that I have only ten questions, but perhaps there may be other things the interviewee would be interested in. I will inform the interviewee that I will jot down some notes, but I will also tape record the interview with their permission if it is okay. I will then commence the interview.

This space below is for follow up of participatory research approaches discussions - and ice breakers: I started with practical details like - who are the participants? How they got to doing what they are doing, their education back ground etc, did they classify themselves as poor? Why? What UPE meant to them? And what does poverty mean to them.

After these general discussions then I proceeded to the field questions.

Prompt: Poverty is a problem that affects us all in accessing education; and UPE is a policy that has impacted on all of us in one way or another.

What exactly has your role been in the UPE policy? Has this policy affected you in anyway? Has it made a difference in your life?

.....

.....

Prompt: Questions 2, 3 & 4 are related to poverty measurement and education achievement. The determinants of poverty in the poorer eastern, Soroti district is food security, land defragmentation, and the depletion of household assets through cattle rustling, and insecurity, while the central regions and affluent Kampala is the

perceived excess demand of Government services and subsequent concerns over monetisation.

Lack of interest has been presented as a major factor why poor children drop out of school. What to think about this?

.....

.....

What do you think of UPE? Do you think it has helped to reduce poverty?

.....

.....

What does education achievement or success mean to you?

.....

.....

Do you think there are regional disparities (differences) in primary education?

.....

.....

Prompt: The Government has concentrated on UPE and underemphasised on non-formal education, adult education and lifelong learning

Is non-formal education (NFE) provided in your locality? Is it provided as an alternative to UPE? Is it competing or is it complimentary to UPE?

.....

.....

How does NFE and UPE work in reality? Is it benefiting poor children and young out-of-school adults?

.....

.....

Prompt:

What type of UPE would you need? What do you think could be done where you live/locality/ area to reduce poverty? (proposals for action)?

.....

Prompt: This is the last question. I will ask the interviewee an open question

Is there anything else you want to say about UPE, NFE and poverty reduction that I haven't covered/mentioned?

Prompt: To round off.

Is there anything else you want to ask me?

.....

Prompt: Finally

Thank you very much for your time - the interview has been very interesting. (I will complete the translation and transcription in Glasgow, but ensured that clarified any issues prior to leaving the field - Uganda).

Appendix IV. Field Questions

- What exactly has your role been in the UPE policy? Has this policy affected you in anyway? Has it made a difference in your life?
- Lack of interest has been presented as a major factor why poor children drop out of school. What to think about this?
- What do you think of UPE? Do you think it has helped to reduce poverty?
- What does education achievement or success mean to you?
- Do you think there are regional disparities (differences) in primary education?
- Is non-formal education (NFE) provided in your locality? Is it provided as an alternative to UPE? Is it competing or is it complimentary to UPE?
- How does NFE and UPE work in reality? Is it benefiting poor children and young out-of-school adults?
- What type of UPE would you need? What do you think could be done where you live/locality/ area to reduce poverty? (proposals for action)
- Is there anything else you want to say about UPE, NFE and poverty reduction that I haven't covered/mentioned?
- Is there anything else you want to ask me?

Appendix V. List of Fieldwork Participants

No.	Date	Name	Institution	Method
1	May 2008	Mrs. Mariam	City Council of Kampala	F2F
2	08 May 2008	Carol (UPE)	City UPE school	F2F
3	08 May 2008	Brenda (UPE)	City UPE school	F2F
4	08 May 2008	Head teacher (HM)	City UPE school	F2F
5	07 May 2008	Devina (UPE)	City UPE school	F2F
6	5 May 2008	Peter (UPE)	Municipality UPE school	FG
7	5 May 2008	Petero (UPE)	Municipality UPE school	FG
8	5 May 2008	Ali (UPE)	Municipality UPE school	FG
9	5 May 2008	Pius (UPE)	Municipality UPE school	FG
10	5 May 2008	Isaiah (UPE)	Municipality UPE school	FG
11	5 May 2008	Timothy (UPE)	Municipality UPE school	FG
12	5 May 2008	Jackson (UPE)	Municipality UPE school	FG
13	11 Apr 2008	Simon, former Tr.	Kaberaido	INF
14	11 Apr 2008	Senior Management staff	Kalaki Sec. School	INF
15	11 Apr 2008	Entrepreneur	Soroti Municipality	INF
16	18 Feb 2008	Christine, Univ.	Soroti	INF
17	2 Feb 2008	Isaac (UPE)	Village UPE school	FG
18	2 Feb 2008	Dinnah(UPE)	Village UPE school	FG
19	08 Dec 2008	HM Village School Samson (HM)	Village UPE school	F2F
20	03 Jan 2008	Betty	Village UPE school	FG
21	03 Jan 2008	Joseph	Village UPE school	FG
22	04 Jan 2008	Scovia (UPE)	Village UPE school	F2F
23	31 Dec 2007	Joramh (UPE)	Village UPE school	F2F
24	8 April 2008	US Peace Corp	Soroti, Municipality	FG

25	8 April 2008	Eko, HM Kamuda	Kamuda Comm Sec. Sch	FG
26	07 Dec 2007	Head teacher	A neighbouring village UPE school	INF
27	Sep 2007	Head teacher	A second neighbouring village UPE school	INF
28	09 Nov	Lecturer	Lecturer Adult Educ MUK	INF
29	06 Dec 2007	AGM, Village school	A third neighbouring village UPE school	PL
30	2 Nov 2007	Member	SMC	PA
31	2 Nov 2007	Member	PTA	PA
32	2 Nov 2007	Member	PTA	PA
33	2 Nov 2007	Senior staff member	Kamuda P.S.	F2F-INF
34	2 Nov 2007	Senior staff member	Kamuda P.S.	INF- INF
35	2 Nov 2007	Senior Official	Soroti PTC	INF
36	24 Sep 2007	CCT Kaberamaido E-jo	Bookshop in Soroti	INF
37	24 Sep 2007	CCT Soroti Municipal	Bookshop in Soroti	INF
38	26 Oct 2007	Municipal Educ. Officer	Soroti Municipal Office	INF
39	26 Oct 2007	Education Official	Inspector of Schools DIS	INF
40	20 Oct 2007	Mary, Secretary	Educ Comm. Members	PA
41	20 Oct 2007	Betty	Educ Comm. Members	PA
42	20 Oct 2007	John	Educ Comm. Members	PA
43	20 Oct 2007	Regin	Educ Comm. Members	PA
44	20 Oct 2007	Oyomai AGM	Parents and Comm. Member	INF
45	03 Oct 2007	Donald	Soroti Admin. Office	INF
46	SepOct 2007	Keith	District Planning Office	INF
47	SepOct 2007	Silvestine	Chairman of a village P.S.	INF
48	Dec 2007	Ebiru	NGO	FG
49	Dec 2007	AGM Meeting	Village school (neighbour)	FG
50	Dec 2007	Senior staff member	Otuboi Sec. School	INF/D

Names are pseudonyms for confidentiality to protect participants

Int: Interviews

F2F: Face to face interviews

FG: Focus groups/Participatory approaches

INF/D: Informal discussions

Appendix VI. Description of the People Interviewed

Introduction

The research participants included: 16 (a) Pioneer UPE graduates of the 1997-2003 cohort and subsequent cohorts until 2001-2007, covering a decade of implementation of UPE. These young adults were between ages 17 to 22 (who were aged between 7 and 12 in 1997) and aged between age 13 to 18 respectively for those in subsequent cohorts of UPE. The adults included 34 people who were concerned with UPE implementation including a selection of (b) households and communities, (c) Government officials, (d) and civil society. This sample is appropriate as it addresses all the key elements of purposeful sampling notably, the purposes of the research, time scales and the constraints, methods of data collection, and the methodology of the research. 50 participants were interviewed. Briefly these categories are described as follows:

Primary leavers

These are the first cohort of this policy launched in 1997, and the cultural sharing group. They had confidence to speak freely and to express their beliefs as they were unafraid of 'toeing' the line. Their perceptions were largely idealist.

Head teachers

Are managers and administrators of the UPE policy at school level. They were sceptical of the UPE policy but committed to their jobs and school communities seem to be playing the game to keep their jobs secure.

Education officials

These professionals were relatively committed to their roles as public servants (civil service) by virtue of their qualification and expertise. Their involvement with UPE was more of professional in nature. They played the game to keep their jobs secure.

Leaders and Education Executive Committee members

They were openly cynical of the UPE policy and disappointed by the gap between the rhetoric and the policy. They were also bitter and resentful by the perceived neglect by central Government.

Others

Some tended to 'play the game' all the time, some tended to play the game some of the time, while others were outright critical. Depending on the level of trust, some were very insecure of criticising UPE, or distrusting others uncritical in their thinking of these Government policies.

Appendix VII. Default Poverty Estimates (Using Current Poverty Line)

MS-1, 1993/94

	Pop. Share	Mean welfare	Contribution to					
			P0	P1	P2	P0	P1	P2
National	100	25895	52.2	18.1	8.39	100	100	100
Rural	87.2	21569	57	20	9.32	95.2	96.2	96.8
Urban	12.8	55256	19.4	5.4	2.09	4.8	3.8	3.2
Central	29.9	37699	34.3	9.9	4.12	19.7	16.4	14.7
East	23.9	20604	59.9	20	9.43	27.4	26.4	26.9
West	27.6	22403	53.7	19	8.39	28.4	28.9	27.6
North	18.6	18896	68.6	27.5	13.91	24.5	28.2	30.8
Central rural	21.9	27050	42.2	12.4	5.19	17.7	15	13.6
Central urban	8	67082	12.7	3.2	1.17	1.9	1.4	1.1
East rural	22.1	19238	62.5	21.1	10.01	26.4	25.7	26.3
East urban	1.8	36961	28.8	7.1	2.43	1	0.7	0.5
West rural	26.3	21567	55.2	19.5	8.67	27.8	28.4	27.2
West urban	1.3	38817	24.8	7.5	2.87	0.6	0.6	0.5
North rural	16.9	17492	71.9	29	14.77	23.3	27.1	29.7
North urban	1.7	32785	36.2	12	5.4	1.2	1.1	1.1

UNHS-3, 2005/06

	Pop. Share	Mean welfare	Contribution to					
			P0	P1	P2	P0	P1	P2
National	100	38856	32.6	9.2	3.74	100	100	100
Rural	84.6	32943	36	10.2	4.17	93.5	94	94.3
Urban	15.4	71449	13.9	3.6	1.39	6.5	6	5.7
Central	29.2	56463	17.9	4.1	1.44	16	12.9	11.2
East	25.2	31729	37.3	9.5	3.63	28.8	26	24.4
West	25.9	38195	23.7	5.9	2.14	18.8	16.5	14.8
North	19.7	22745	60.1	20.8	9.39	36.4	44.6	49.5
Central rural	20.6	43873	22.9	5.3	1.84	14.5	11.8	10.1
Central urban	8.6	86677	5.7	1.2	0.48	1.5	1.1	1.1
East rural	23.2	29386	39	10	3.81	27.8	25.1	23.6
East urban	2	59317	17.1	4.4	1.55	1	0.9	0.8
West rural	23.9	35654	24.8	6.2	2.26	18.2	16	14.4
West urban	2	69037	9.8	2.2	0.71	0.6	0.5	0.4
North rural	16.9	20668	63.6	22.4	10.2	33	41.1	46.1
North urban	2.8	35205	39.3	11.4	4.53	3.4	3.5	3.4

Appendix VIII. A Selection of Pictures from the Fieldwork



Picture 1. Professor Julia Preece and some community members



Picture 2. A homestead in Kamuda and a bicycle used during my fieldwork



Picture 3. A UPE village school in Kamuda



Picture 4. Teachers houses in the UPE village school in Kamuda



Picture 5. Professor Julia and community members at a village UPE school



Picture 6. A Municipality UPE school (1)



Picture 7. A Municipality UPE school (2)



Picture 8. A Municipality UPE school – with UPE graduates (3)



Picture 9. A city UPE primary school, administration block



Picture 10. Entrance to the city UPE school, Kampala