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# The challenges of universal primary education in Uganda through distance education programmes

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## Abstract

This article reports on teacher education in Uganda, with specific reference to the role that distance education has played in upgrading the quality of education in general and in supplying more qualified teachers to meet a growing demand, specifically for teachers involved in primary education. The investigation paves the way for the establishment of the Open University of Uganda and illustrates how the Primary Education Policy of Uganda has increased access to 7 million primary school learners to schools in 2002. The article also explains how the qualifications of 10 000 in-service teachers have been upgraded between 1995 and 2000. The successes of two major in-service teacher education programmes are discussed. The article also explains how the Mubende Integrated Teacher Education Project (MITEP) not only contributed to the training of teachers, but also focused the attention of educators on the possibilities of distance education for Uganda. Furthermore, it also argues that the Northern Integrated Teacher Education Project (NITEP) has on the other hand achieved successes in the field of in-service teacher education. The programmes assisted in the training of academic support

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staff who work in distance education. The article concludes by addressing the further needs of distance education in Uganda and highlights the challenges facing distance education programmes in Uganda.

Keywords: academic support; achievements; challenges; concerns; distance education; efficiency; open learning; success rates; teacher education.

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## 1. Introduction

Uganda, set in the heart of Africa astride the Equator, had a population of nearly 23 million people by 2002, with an annual population growth of 3.1 per cent. A large proportion of the population is of school-going age since 49.2 per cent of the total population is below 15 years of age. Also, 86 per cent of this population lives in the rural areas (United Nations Development Programme 2003, 2).

Uganda was a British protectorate from 1894 until October 1962 when it gained independence. Prior to independence, school education (which had been introduced by missionaries in 1877) was modelled along the British system of education. This heritage is still evident in the Ugandan school system today.

The school system is structured in a hierarchical order to a 7-4-2-3 system. That is to say, 7 years of primary education, 4 years at Secondary 'O' level, 2 years at Secondary 'A' level and a minimum of 3 years at university level. At the end of each stage there is a national examination. This structure makes the education system highly selective and pyramidal in nature, with smaller numbers of students towards the apex of the pyramid. In spite of the selective nature of the system, school education has continued to expand. The various governments in power since independence have placed great emphasis on the expansion of primary and secondary education to ensure that education in Uganda contributes to the development of the nation. For example, in 1999 Uganda had 10 500 primary schools and 625 secondary schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1999, 5). By 2002 the number of primary schools had risen to 14 420 and pupil enrolment had also risen steadily: 'over the years 2000, 2001, and 2002 enrolment levels in all primary schools were at 6 559 013, 6 900 916, 7 354 153 respectively' (Republic of Uganda 2002, 1). Although the school system has continued to expand, the need for more and better trained teachers has remained.

The expansion of the primary education landscape has also impacted directly upon the needs and capacity of tertiary training institutions in Uganda. Education authorities in Uganda have therefore had to consider alternative means of meeting the above demand, particularly in higher education. The government has not only encouraged entrepreneurs to open up training institutions or universities, but has also strongly recommended the use of distance and open learning. In fact, the government White Paper on Education recommends that 'an open university should be planned and provided before the year 2000' (Republic of Uganda 1992, 95). Although an Open University has not yet been established, plans are under way to do so. In November

1999 the Minister of State for Higher Education commissioned a Task Force to look into the possibility of setting up an Open University in Uganda. Since this Task Force has already completed its assignment and submitted its report to the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Open University of Uganda will hopefully be established soon.

The White Paper on Education also acknowledges in particular the role that distance and open learning can play in the training of teachers. As pointed out earlier, the school system has expanded, and well-trained teachers are needed to ensure quality education in these schools. Teacher-training institutions are still not producing enough teachers to meet the demand in schools, and the Ministry of Education and Sports consequently recommended the use of distance and open learning methodologies for the training and re-training of teachers. In fact, the White Paper on Education recommends that '[f]rom 1992/93 onwards crash programmes for training and re-training teachers will be mounted. Increased enrolment and training of teachers will be undertaken . . . through the in-service training system, training on the job and long distance education, (Republic of Uganda 1992, 4).

Uganda is clearly faced with the challenges of an increasing demand for education and an expanding school system, both of which also imply a growing need for teachers. Distance education has been used to meet these challenge, and in the next sections the focus will be on attempts to provide an adequate number of teachers, particularly for the primary school system.

## 2. The theoretical framework underpinning the investigation

The investigation reflected in this report, attempts to provide to the reader an explanatory, interpretive and reflective overview of teacher training in Uganda, with specific reference to the impact distance education has had in answering to the nation's call for more primary school teachers specifically. The investigation falls within Sirotnik's (see Short 1991, 245) critical inquiry, but also contains elements of an evaluative praxis (King in Short 1991, 259) often used in curriculum and programme evaluation.

## 3. Universal Primary Education policy

School education was introduced in Uganda by white missionaries mainly for the children of chiefs, and to prepare and train functionaries needed by the British colonial government. Right from the outset, the school system was not open to all and it increasingly became highly selective and competitive, with fewer and fewer students proceeding to the next level of education. As a result, many Ugandans have remained illiterate. According to the Ministry of Education and Sports, literacy rates were only 67 per cent in 1999, while primary education reached 'only 50 per cent of the age group' (1999, 7). It was against this background that, in December 1996, President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni launched a policy of Universal Primary Education in accordance with

the government's White Paper on Education (Ministry of Education and Sports 1992). In terms of this policy, the government was to provide 'free' education to a maximum of four children from each family. The policy has been changed in the meantime, because, in the words of President Museveni, 'all children of school-going age should benefit from Universal Primary Education (UPE)' (Olupot 2002).

The major objectives of Universal Primary Education may be summarised as follows (Ministry of Education and Sports 1999, 10):

- Making basic education accessible to learners and relevant to their needs, as well as meeting national goals
- Making education equitable in order to eliminate disparities and inequalities
- Establishing, providing and maintaining quality education as the basis for promoting the necessary human resource development
- Initiating a fundamental positive transformation of society in the social, economic and political field
- Ensuring that education is affordable to the majority of Ugandans by providing, initially, the minimum necessary facilities and resources, and progressively the optimal facilities
- Enabling every child to enter and remain in school until he/she completes the primary education cycle.

As a result of this policy, much has been achieved and this is the subject of discussion in the next section.

## 4. Achievements of Universal Primary Education

### 4.1 Increased access to primary education

Enrolment figures after the launching of Universal Primary Education increased dramatically from close to 2,5 million in 1996 and 6,8 million in 2000 to 7,3 million in 2002 (Ministry of Education and Sports 2001a, 1, Republic of Uganda 2002, 1). This increase was due mainly to two reasons: (1) the backlog of school-age children who had previously not had access to school could now be erased, and (2) more of the children who were reaching school age and would prior to Universal Primary Education not have been able to afford education, were now able to join school. This policy also focused specifically on the education of girls, the disabled and orphans. There has therefore been an increase in the enrolment of, for example, girls from 39 per cent in 1970 to nearly 49 per cent in 2001.

To facilitate easy access to schools, the Ministry of Education and Sports, furthermore, embarked on the building of more primary and secondary schools. For example, by the end of 1999, 4 000 additional classrooms had been constructed for

primary school children, while by end of 2001, a total number of 6 321 classrooms had been completed – an additional 2 321 classrooms in one year (Ministry of Education and Sports 2001b, 3).

#### 4.2 More teachers trained

An increase in the number of children in school invariably implies an increase in the need for teachers. To deal with this dilemma, and as part of the wider reform under the Primary Education and Teacher Development Project, there have been deliberate efforts to restructure primary teacher education and to increase the number of teachers trained/retrained/upgraded. As a result, between 1995 and 1999 ‘7 800 in-service teachers have been trained or upgraded. In addition 3 023 candidates in pre-service courses for teachers have completed their training’ while another 2 118 were expected to complete their training (Ministry of Education and Sports 1999, 12). Yet, despite the fact that the number of teachers has grown, there are still too few of them to deal with the massive number of children in school. In fact, the teacher–pupil ratio in primary schools has deteriorated, since in 1996 it was 1:38, and by 1999 it had worsened to 1:64 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1999, 11).

### 5. Challenges facing Universal Primary Education

Notwithstanding its achievements, Universal Primary Education has been confronted by a number of challenges. The massive increase in pupil numbers immediately created a problem of classroom space. Although the Ministry has embarked on a drive to build more schools and provide sufficient instructional materials, the results are still vastly inadequate (p. 11). It is therefore feared that the massive numbers of learners in schools without commensurate expansion in facilities, teachers and teaching/learning materials may have compromised the quality of education. Although no thorough studies have yet been carried out to confirm these fears, some concern has been voiced by the Ministry of Education and Sports (p. 12).

Another issue related to the quality of education is the morale of teachers. Prior to the introduction of Universal Primary Education, most schools charged additional fees through their Parent–Teacher Associations. Some of this money was used to supplement teachers’ salaries. This is obviously no longer the practice and teachers have to cope with extremely low salaries.

The Ministry of Education and Sports has nevertheless done a commendable job so far in ensuring that Universal Primary Education is introduced and that the primary school system copes in most respects. The next challenge will be to cope with the bulge in secondary and higher education as more and more primary school children enter secondary school and later higher education. This pressure is already being felt. In 2001 for instance, 360 000 children sat for the Primary Leaving examinations and 250 000 of them qualified for post-primary education. Only 150 000 children were eventually

admitted into the 734 government-aided secondary schools and 29 technical and farm rural schools. This means that 100 000 children were not placed in any of the government schools (Mugaba 2002).

As mentioned earlier, the increase in pupil numbers as a result of the introduction of Universal Primary Education has amplified the need for more teachers. The Ugandan Government has done some work in this regard, and a number of teachers have been trained and upgraded. However, the teacher-to-pupil ratios are still poor, having almost doubled between 1996 and 1999 (from 1:38 to 1:64). Also, the number of untrained teachers – despite having been greatly reduced – is still high. For example, in 1989 only 52.2 per cent of the teachers were trained, while the corresponding figure in 2001 was 75 per cent. This means that, in effect, 25 per cent of the primary school teaching force is still untrained. This fact, coupled with the poor teacher-to-pupil ratio, certainly exerts pressure on the school system (Ministry of Education and Sports 1999, 12).

It is for this reason that the Ministry of Education and Sports has acknowledged the role and place of distance education in closing this gap.

What has become obvious for Uganda is that distance education apparently remains one of the more feasible strategies to supplement the shortages and under-provision of teachers in the country. However, many authors question the feasibility of distance education for the upgrading of teachers' qualifications in a developing country (Fraser, Potter and Meier 2003) arguing that distance education falls short in providing the necessary support and subject-specific development characterising contact education models. This article therefore attempts to address two prominent problems often associated with distance education – the first being the efficiency of a distance education programme to deal with teacher training in a developing country and the second being the maintenance of acceptable standards in achieving such goal.

## 6. Distance Education Programmes for primary school teachers in Uganda

As mentioned in the first part of this article, there is still a serious need for more teachers in the primary school system in Uganda. The current teacher training schemes are not adequate to train all the new entrants and, at the same time train the untrained and upgrade the under-trained. The majority of primary school teachers in Uganda are teachers with a Grade 3 Teacher's Certificate. Grade 3 teachers are trained by the primary teachers' colleges whose minimum entry requirement is an 'O'-level Certificate with 6 passes including mathematics and English language. It is also possible for a primary school teacher to upgrade to diploma or graduate level. Therefore, trained primary school teachers hold varied qualifications, while it is also true that many who are employed in the teaching force do not have any training at all. Distance education has been seen as a viable alternative that may supplement the efforts of the full-time teacher training colleges.

To implement this alternative, Uganda moved on to start distance education projects in teacher training. In January 1992 the Mubende Integrated Teacher Education Project (MITEP) was launched in the Mubende and Kiboga districts to train primary school teachers. The success of this project led to its duplication in the northern region of the country with the launching of the Northern Integrated Teacher Education Project (NITEP). The latter is now being run as a national programme by the former Institute of Teacher Education, Kyambogo (ITEK) or Kyambogo University. The same thing happened when the Teacher Development and Management System (TDMS) was launched as a pilot project for the training of head teachers, as it is now run as a national programme by Kyambogo University (Aguti 1996, 13–14; Aguti 2000, 260).

Various other universities are providing upgrading opportunities for primary school teachers through distance education programmes. For example, Makerere University – through its External Degree Programme – offers a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) (External) that admits both primary and secondary school teachers. Kyambogo University offers a Diploma in Primary Education (External) in addition to its TDMS programme, while Mukono University offers a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.). Since these are upgrading programmes, they do not add to the number of trained teachers but help raise the level of teachers' qualifications.

### 6.1 Mubende Integrated Teacher Education Project (MITEP)

As mentioned earlier, the government declaration of Universal Primary Education was, in part, a response to what the White Paper on Education had recommended. However, even prior to the launching of universal primary education some districts in Uganda realised the need to train untrained and under-trained teachers. The first to do this were the Mubende and Kiboga districts because 80 per cent of teachers were untrained. An in-service distance education project called the *Mubende Integrated Teacher Education Project* (MITEP) was launched in these two districts in January 1992, and it ran until April 1995. The necessary funds were provided by the Overseas Development Agency, Action Aid United Kingdom (AAUK), the Government of Uganda and the Local District Administrations of Kiboga and Mubende. The project, managed by the districts in collaboration with the Primary Teachers' Colleges, had the following aims (Robinson and Murphy 1996, 15):

- (i) [t]o improve the quality of primary education in the Mubende District by providing practical access to high quality education and training of untrained primary school teachers; and
- (ii) to test the feasibility and evaluate the cost effectiveness of the MITEP teacher training methodology, in order to assess its worth as a model for replication throughout Uganda.

This project was launched among 900 students who had been selected on the basis

of the results of a placement test that every shortlisted applicant had completed (p. 17). These students had to write the placement test because they did not have the minimum entry requirements for entry into a Grade 3 Teacher's Certificate Course. The placement test was therefore supposed to establish entry abilities of the candidates and to provide equivalent passes.

The course was run using a study package that included written study material, residential sessions and student support services. The development of the study material was based on the Grade 3 revised Primary Teachers' College syllabus for the same subjects as those offered in the primary teachers' colleges (PTCs). It included foundations of education, English, mathematics, science, social studies and teaching practice.

At the end of the study programme the students of this project were assessed in the same way as the residential primary teachers' college students.

### *6.1.1 Achievements of MITEP*

Although MITEP had some problems, it can overall be said to have been successful. The following are some of the achievements of the project.

*Training of teachers:* Although MITEP set out to train 900 teachers and actually proceeded to recruit that number, not all of the 900 completed and/or passed the final examinations. Only 306 (35.4%) passed and therefore attained the Grade 3 Teacher's Certificate. Another 384 (42.7%) failed the examinations, while 197 (21.9%) did not complete the course (Robinson and Murphy 1996, 17). Despite a pass rate of only about 35 per cent, the project had helped 306 previously untrained teachers in the districts to receive training and gain certification (see Figure 1 for the completion rates).

To evaluate the success of a programme on the basis of examination pass rates is obviously inadequate, but due to lack of data it was impossible to make any other assessment. Nevertheless, since no learning is ever totally futile, even those who failed the examinations must have learnt something and perhaps emerged as better teachers than they had been before. As Robinson and Murphy (1996, 21) found out, 'even where teachers did not succeed, benefits were frequently claimed (improved lesson planning and schemes of work, better classroom organisation, more use of locally made visual aids, and increased knowledge of subjects and teaching methods)'.

*Increased interest in distance education:* MITEP became the precursor to similar distance education projects in other districts and eventually nationally. The lessons learnt from this project were utilised in the launching of the Rakai Integrated Teacher Education Project (RITEP) based in the Rakai district and later the Northern Integrated Teacher Education Project (NITEP) that was based in the north and east of the country (Robinson and Murphy 1996, 22; Aguti 2000, 259).

It is particularly significant to note that the government-funded NITEP initially

used materials that had been developed for MITEP – an indication of government’s increased interest and support for distance education, as well as its appreciation for MITEP.

## 6.2 The Northern Integrated Teacher Education Project (NITEP)

NITEP was started in April 1994 as part of the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme (NURP). From 1986 to date, some parts of the north and east of Uganda have been ravaged by war and civil strife which have destroyed social services and all other sectors, leaving the districts paralysed (Wrightson 1998, 13; Aguti 2000, 259). Government set up the NURP in a bid to help those affected districts, and education was one of those services that needed urgent reconstruction. The objectives of NITEP were (Wrightson 1998, 16) to:

- improve the quality and performance of 3 040 untrained school teachers on the Northern Districts within a two-year period;
- increase the number of trained and qualified primary school teachers in the Northern Region by about 17 per cent in the four-year implementation period; and
- in four years, have tested the viability and cost-effectiveness of an innovative teacher training methodology so as to evaluate its worth as a model for replication on a nationwide scale.

To achieve these objectives, NITEP used a study package that was in many ways similar to that used by MITEP. It included the following:

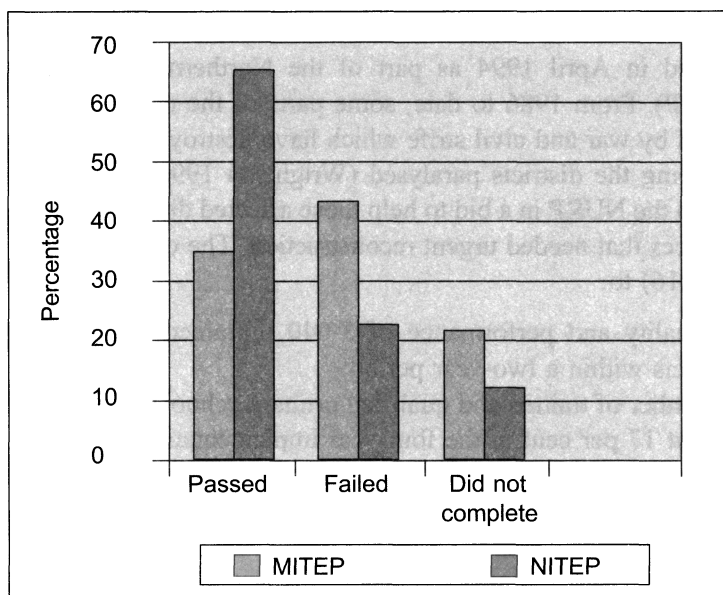
- Printed study materials.
- Audio cassettes. These were limited and did not cover all the subjects of study. The only subjects that had the audio component were Professional Studies, Music and Mathematics (Wrightson 1998, 24).
- Student study group meetings, mainly through the study centres and the Coordinating Centres.
- Residential sessions.
- Tutor visits and support.

### 6.2.1 Achievements of NITEP

This subsection will give a brief outline of some of the achievements of NITEP.

*Training of teachers:* At the start of the project, it was stated specifically that NITEP intended to train a total of 3 040 teachers, thereby increasing the number of teachers in the region by 17 per cent. A total of 3 128 students enrolled for the training programme but only 2 755 sat for the Grade 3 Teacher’s Certificate Examinations. Of these, 1 763 passed the examinations after the first sitting and a further 288 after the second sitting, rendering a total of 2 051 (66%) successful students (Wrightson 1998,

55). By the end of 1998 NITEP had succeeded in training and passing 2 051 teachers; a commendable achievement considering the conditions under which NITEP was run – in a war-ravaged and troubled region (see Figure 1 as compiled from Robinson and Murphy (1996, 17) and Wrightson (1998, 55) for the completion rate).



**Source:** Robinson and Murphy (1996, 17 and Wrightson (1998, 55).

**Figure 1:** MITEP and NITEP Completion and Pass Rates.

When compared with MITEP, NITEP achieved a higher examination pass rate in spite of these tough conditions and the authors believe this was the result of

- the intensive follow-up of students by means of student group meetings and the participation of the Coordinating Centre Tutors
- close involvement of the Ministry of Education in the overall supervision of the programme, unlike MITEP that only relied on the districts.

*Distance education 'experts':* One of the major components of NITEP was the training of student support staff. This was meant to ensure that NITEP had trained staff who would be able to offer support to its students. Besides, some of the staff of NITEP eventually registered for the University of London's Diploma in Distance Education as a result of their involvement in NITEP. It could also be said that NITEP (perhaps even more than MITEP) helped to boost national interest in and appreciation of distance education.

*Implementation structure:* The service delivery model that was used by NITEP,

which involved the Ministry of Education and Sports, Institute of Teacher Education, Kyambogo (ITEK), Primary Teachers' Colleges and Primary Schools, laid the basis for the national implementation phase. Under the Primary Teacher Development and Management Plan, which is a NITEP legacy, Coordinating centres are expected to play a pivotal role in the training and monitoring of trainees.

### 6.3 Teacher Development and Management System (TDMS)

The Teacher Development and Management System (TDMS) was developed as part of the overall Primary Education and Teacher Development Project (PETDP). Funding for this component came from various sources, including the Ugandan government, IDA, USAID (in its initial stages), the Royal Netherlands Government, and Irish Aid (in the later stages). TDMS activities were initially meant to cover only ten districts, but they eventually spread to all the districts of the country (Odaet and Higwira 1994; Makau 2001, 4).

The overall aim of TDMS was to improve teaching and learning in primary schools by developing a teacher education system that 'integrated pre- and in-service training approaches'. According to Odaet and Higwira (1994) and Makau (2001, 4) the specific objectives of TDMS were to

- develop and streamline teacher education curricula;
- develop materials . . . to foster the implementation of the new curricula
- conduct training of teacher educators
- set up a teacher education framework based on a network of core primary teachers' colleges, associated coordination centres and outreach primary schools;
- use the core primary teachers' colleges-based network to conduct pre-service and in-service training of primary school teachers and head teachers.

To achieve the above objectives, a number of different training programmes were run by TDMS. These included

- in-service training programme for the untrained primary school teachers
- the Headteachers' Management Training Course
- the Outreach Tutor Training Programme.

TDMS ran these programmes through a Central and District Management Framework that involved the following stakeholders:

- Ministry of Education and Sports officials at headquarters
- Principals, deputy principals and tutors of primary teachers' colleges
- Institute of Teacher Education, Kyambogo
- District education officers.

The study package for the various programmes was very similar to that used by NITEP and, as remarked earlier, the concept of the decentralised management of the programmes and provision of student support was a NITEP legacy.

### 6.3.1 Achievements of TDMS

- *Training of education staff:* TDMS has been able to train different categories of education staff ranging from principals of primary teachers' colleges to community mobilisers. Table 1 gives a summary of the total numbers trained under the different categories.

**Table 1:** Education staff trained under TDMS.

Staff category	Numbers trained
Untrained teachers upgrading to Grade 3	8 685
Headteachers	7 414
Principals of Core primary teachers' colleges	18
Deputy Principals in Core primary teachers' colleges	36
Heads of programmes based in Core primary teachers' colleges	54
Coordination centre tutors	539
Volunteer community mobilisers	13 000

**Source:** Adapted from Makau (2001, 9–10).

It should, however, be pointed out that the needs and pressures resulting from the launch of universal primary education far surpass the achievements. The implementation of Universal Primary Education meant a further recruitment of untrained teachers and TDMS did not have the capacity to absorb all these numbers (Makau 2001, 10). (The addition of more than 8 000 trained teachers to the primary school system is nevertheless something that the country would never have achieved using the full-time residential training through the primary teachers' colleges. It is, however, difficult at this point to work out completion rates for each category because admission figures are not readily available.)

- *Development of teacher education curricula and materials:* TDMS developed study material for each of the programmes that were run, and both the distance education students and internal students are using this material. TDMS introduced courses that had never before been offered in the country. For example, prior to TDMS, there was

no training programme for head teachers in the country, while the Outreach Tutor Training programme is another new addition. TDMS has indeed enriched teacher education programmes in the country.

- *Involvement of a cross-section of education staff:* As stated earlier, a cross-section of education staff from the Ministry of Education and Sports, from teachers' colleges and from the districts were all involved in running the TDMS programmes. Bringing together all these persons was a major achievement. Although there were some managerial problems, a good start was made with the integration of staff and services – an important element that is still largely missing in the Ugandan education system.

Overall, it can be said that TDMS achieved most of its objectives. The fact that plans are being made to institutionalise its activities is testimony to the fact that the government of Uganda has confidence in distance education for the training of teachers. Apart from the growing interest and confidence in distance education, the authors believe that TDMS has been hugely successful for the following reasons:

- As the scheme received external funding support it was possible to produce all the study material required, hold a variety of workshops, and promptly and adequately pay staff involved in the programme.
- The involvement of the Ministry of Education and Sports is in many ways a reflection of the political will to implement this scheme.
- The network of Primary Teachers' Colleges provided student support.

## 7. Diploma in Primary Education (external) (DPEE)

The Diploma in primary education (External) was launched in April 1999 at the then Institute of Teacher Education (ITEK), now Kyambogo University. The aim of this programme was to upgrade Grade 3 teachers to diploma level by means of distance education over a minimum period of three years and a maximum period of five years.

According to the Kyambogo University records (Kyambogo University 2002), the general aims of the programme are to

- increase the intake in Primary Education students and upgrade courses to meet the urgent national need for primary school teachers
- provide an opportunity to eligible and interested teachers who cannot pursue fulltime courses at colleges/institutions or universities
- develop a more flexible mode of education that caters for a variety of needs changing circumstances and different learning requirements of the teachers
- develop human resources for the Universal Primary Education Programme.

To achieve these aims, the programme is based on a study package that includes print-based study modules developed specifically in a distance education mode, compulsory residential sessions and student group meetings.

## 7.1 Achievements of the Diploma in Primary Education

Although this programme is only into its fourth year, there have already been considerable achievements. As mentioned earlier, a teacher needs a minimum of a Grade 3 certificate to teach in the primary schools in Uganda. Upgrading teachers to the diploma level therefore does not add any new teachers to the teaching force, but it does enable teachers to upgrade to a higher qualification. Thus it cannot be said that the Diploma in Primary Education (External) (DPEE) Programme has solved the need for more trained teachers to cope with Universal Primary Education, but since teachers attain higher qualifications through this programme, it can be assumed that it enhances their knowledge and skills in their subjects and responsibilities. Also, more and more districts are recruiting only those teachers who have at least a Diploma in Education for headship positions. In this regard, this programme should help increase the number of teachers who can rise to this level.

Since the launch of the Diploma in Primary Education (External) in April 1999, there have already been two intakes. The first involved 800 students, while the second involved 1 800 students. Not only are more teachers trained, but the study material produced on this programme is used by other teachers on similar but full-time programmes. In this way other Diploma in Education programmes offered in the country should be strengthened.

One last thing that needs to be pointed out is that the Diploma in Primary Education (External) programme works in close co-operation and collaboration with core primary teachers' colleges that implement the TDMS programmes.

The different programmes that have been discussed in this article indicate that Uganda has attempted to introduce distance education for the training of primary school teachers in order to help the country face the challenge of Universal Primary Education. However, as already indicated, there have been a number of challenges and the last section of the article will discuss these.

## 8. Challenges facing distance education programmes in Uganda

### 8.1 Sustainability of programmes

Nearly all the programmes discussed here – with the exception of the External Degree Programme and the Diploma in Primary Education – have relied heavily on external funding. Although this has helped to start and run the programmes to the end of their project lives, it raises the question of sustainability. According to Makau (2001, 21), '[t]he TDMS project illustrates the need for Uganda to pro-actively consider long-term sustainability of social development initiatives. External funds constituted the highest proportion of the resources invested in the project (e.g. over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Phases I–III). Uganda needs to consider how dependence on external funding could be reduced.'

Many other programmes continue to be hampered by inadequate funding. This seems to be the case with the Makerere University External Degree Programme which

has failed to produce all the required study materials due to inadequate funding, since it relies entirely on student fees (Aguti 2000, 276). Although distance education can be cheaper, it is only possible in the long run. Initial heavy investment is always essential. The following question could therefore be posed: 'How willing are governments and institutions to provide distance education by investing in these programmes?' As Uganda struggles to meet the enormous demands made by Universal Primary Education, the question of the sustainability of distance teacher education programmes needs to receive critical attention.

## 8.2 Quality

Quality is of paramount importance in education. It is a concern of many institutions that offer distance education programmes and teacher education programmes. Such concerns involve the quality of the

- programmes being offered
- candidates recruited in the teacher training institutions
- services provided in the distance education programmes
- outputs by the distance education programmes
- education system as a whole.

The issue of quality is still unresolved in teacher education. True, through these programmes a number of trained teachers have been added to the system; but the enormous increase in primary school enrolments and the growing numbers of secondary schools in the country still exceed these efforts by far. Much more therefore needs to be done, otherwise schools will continue to be filled with untrained teachers and this could have an adverse effect on the quality of primary school education.

No tracer studies have so far been carried out to establish the impact of the different programmes on the school system. Therefore, despite the fact that distance education is growing in the country, there are still fears that its products are not as good as those trained through full-time residential programmes. Some of the reasons for these fears are the low entry passes for those joining these programmes, the low pass rates and high drop-out rates.

Distance education has been used to address inequalities, thereby giving its clients a second chance at education (De Wolf 1994, 1558; Holmberg 1995, 13; Rumble 1992, 19). It seems to have been the case with all the teacher education programmes that have been discussed in this article. Unfortunately, because the majority of those joining the programmes had low entry passes, the perception was reinforced that distance education was for failures. In addition, distance education has been accused of having high drop-out rates and low pass rates, in spite of high initial enrolments (Fraser 1992, 122; Holmberg 2001, 73; Keegan and Rumble 1982, 228; Paul 1990, 79; Perraton 2000, 12). In the distance teacher education programmes that have been run in Uganda, drop-out

rates are unacceptably high and pass rates low. For example, B.Ed (External) has an average drop-out rate of 40 per cent and only minimal Upper Second Class degree passes.

The providers of distance education therefore have to ensure that the systems that are put in place, in fact, facilitate quality teacher training, otherwise distance education will continue to be viewed as an inferior alternative, good enough for failures and one that only produces mediocre graduates.

### 8.3 Relating to Policy on Recruitment

Government employs the majority of teachers in Uganda, with the result that their salaries are dependent on government policy. For example, traditionally primary school teachers were holders of a Grade 3 teacher's certificate and consequently their salary was set at that level. However, the opportunities for upgrading have made it increasingly difficult for government to accommodate all the upgraded teachers in the salary budget. This is particularly the case for primary school teachers who upgrade to either diploma or graduate level.

Many of these teachers have upgraded but have had problems registering and having their salary adjusted to the new level achieved. This is obviously demoralising and likely to affect the enrolments in some of the distance education programmes. For example, a circular from the Ministry of Education and Sports states that 'attainment of higher qualifications will not automatically lead to promotion to Grade V or Graduate teacher' (Lubanga 28 May 2002, 3).

The challenge of an increased wage bill creates a scenario similar to what was experienced by South Africa. According to the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) (1992, 31), '[i]t follows that any significant increase in the number of qualified teachers, and in the number of teachers who have upgraded their qualifications, will increase the education budget proportionally.'

### 8.4 Integrating Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the programmes

All the distance education programmes in Uganda that have been discussed in this article have relied on print material and have not integrated other technologies. The challenge for distance education programmes in Uganda is therefore to start exploring the possibility of integrating information and communication technologies (ICTs) in their programmes. This is especially critical because of the widespread use of these technologies in various other sectors of society. Teachers trained in Uganda need to be knowledgeable with regard to these technologies if they are to have a competitive edge in the world of education today.

A new syllabus on computer science has also been developed for primary schools in Uganda, and for this to be effectively run, the teachers involved must have knowledge

of, and experience in, the use of computers. Other opportunities that are being created are the different projects that involve the use of information and communication technologies. For example, a total of 32 secondary schools are participating in the World Links for Development (WorLD) programme, and teachers in these and other schools certainly need the necessary exposure and skills to exploit the information and communication technologies that are provided fully. One way of achieving this would be by integrating information and communication technologies as a part of the teachers' training courses.

Access to information and communication technologies is still poor and designing programmes that make extensive use of technologies may be hampered by poor access to such technologies. The question of the access of institutions, staff and students to information and communication technologies is therefore a critical one.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The authors have tried to explain the Universal Primary Education policy in Uganda, as well as the attempts that have been made to cope with the challenge of providing teachers for the many schools and pupils through distance training. It is clear that headway has been made in meeting the increasing demand for primary school teachers in Uganda, but current efforts are still inadequate for meeting the enormous need created by the implementation of Universal Primary Education. Also, the programmes that have been run so far have faced a number of challenges, and distance educators need to rise to these challenges if the potential of distance education in Uganda and the interest created are to be exploited fully.

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