

Introduction

In response to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Jomtien Declaration for Education For All (EFA), countries were committed to provide equitable educational opportunities to their citizens through Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE). This international movement with the over-arching goal “to expand learning opportunities for every child, youth, and adult in the world by 2015” (Burnett et al., 2008: 5, 10) has achieved a positive impact on student enrolments in many target countries with under-resourced educational sectors. In Uganda, for example, student enrolments doubled to over 5.3 million pupils in 1997, following the introduction of UPE, from 2.7 million pupils in 1996 and it again rose to 6.9 million pupils in 2001 (Ministry of Education and Sports [MOES], 2003). This international movement has put much more pressure on low income nations, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) to train additional teachers, provide textbooks and other learning resources as well as building more schools (Leach, 2008).

Furthermore, Liang (2002) indicated that even when schools have budgets for instructional materials, they actually spend very little on textbooks and library budgets. They actually spend as little as 2 percent of the total budgets in most cases. Schools have tended to focus their spending on what they see as the day-to-day imperatives of meeting the costs such as teachers’ salaries and essential building repairs. Teachers’ salaries actually consume the major portion of the school budgets in majority of SSA countries.

To compound these challenges even further, the few available instructional materials and textbooks are often outdated and irrelevant to the school curricula. It is not uncommon in SSA to find up to 5 students or more

sharing a single textbook in their classroom settings. It is important also to note that having instructional materials and textbooks in schools may not necessarily mean that those resources are readily accessible and utilisable in meaningful ways to be reflected in students' academic excellence (Mugimu, 2004; Obanya, 2003). Thus, a mere availability of instructional materials and textbooks in a school may not necessarily be translated into considerable students' performance unless they are put to good use (Schubert & Prouty-Harris, 2003). On the other hand, many schools in SSA are served by untrained teachers, who may lack the skills to use the print and other instructional learning media effectively. This has become an important policy implication for teacher education and questioned the way teachers are being prepared/trained to deal with the instructional materials (Adams, Kee, & Lin, 2001; World Bank, 1995: 86).

Indeed, with the inadequately trained and untrained teachers forming the biggest portion of the teaching work force in SSA (Mulkeen, Chapman, Dejaeghere, Leu, & Bryener, 2005), the teaching and learning processes have tended to be teacher-centred rather than learner-centred. Thus, learners spend enormous amounts of school/class time listening to what teachers have to say and copying what is on the chalkboard into their notebooks instead of engaging in meaningful interactive activities with the subject matter (Bregman & Bryner, 2003: 15). Consequently, learning and teaching tend to become less exciting to the majority of learners and their teachers.

As such, there are numerous constraints that undermine/compromise the teaching and learning experiences of teachers and learners as well as the educational quality in SSA. For instance, even the few well-trained teachers often opt out of the teaching profession to find other better paying jobs (Mulkeen et al., 2005). The HIV/AIDS epidemic also has and still claims many teachers through deaths, rampant absenteeism due to illnesses or caring