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The role of Public Private Partnerships in enhancing access to quality Education: The Case of PEAS Intervention in Uganda

Executive Statement

Despite Uganda's efforts to enhance access to secondary education through the universal secondary education (USE) programme, access to secondary education remains a challenge—especially for poor students and girls. Also, the quality of education in USE schools remains low. In addition, the secondary school system is characterised by low transition and completion rates. Public Private Partnerships (PPP) offer an opportunity to close the gaps in access to education as well as address quality concerns. This brief summarizes the findings of a study that evaluated the Promotion of Equality in African Schools (PEAS)'s network schools—a PPP arrangement—under the Uganda USE programme.¹ The results indicate that the PEAS intervention enhanced access to education for poor students and those from remote and hard to reach areas. In addition, students in PEAS schools, who hitherto had poor PLE grades, performed as well as those in private and government schools in the assessment exams suggesting that PEAS intervention improved education quality. The main pathways for quality improvement were school inspection, functionality of parents-teachers associations, effectiveness of child protection policies, and teacher motivation through timely pay and in-service training, among others. These findings have key policy implications. First, carefully selected PPPs are key in enhancing education access and quality. Second, school inspections enhance teacher performance and hence education quality. Third, teacher motivation through timely payments and trainings enhance their productivity. Finally, availability of child protection policies at schools as well as actual enforcement are critical for enhancing student concentration and performance.

Introduction

Efforts by many countries to provide equitable and affordable access to quality education have increased due to the political pressure at home and domestication of global initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs aim to deepen the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by sustaining access, especially for poor students, and closing the gender gap. The SDGs also aim to address the short comings of the MDGs by improving learning outcomes, and increasing completion rates and transition to secondary and tertiary education.

In 2007, Uganda introduced Universal Secondary Education (USE), which aimed at expanding access to secondary education. With USE, enrolment in secondary schools expanded modestly to 1,457,277 students in 2016 from 814,087 in 2006 (Education Management Information System, 2002 - 2016). The USE programme provided scholarships to about 69 percent of students enrolled in public and private secondary schools in Uganda in 2016. Furthermore, 47

percent of those under the USE scholarship were girls. However, there is scope to increase access further to accommodate the thousands of students who are still completing primary and not transitioning to secondary. For instance, only 326,591 students of the 876,534 who completed the primary cycle transitioned into secondary school in 2015. Girls and poorer students tended to make up the majority of those locked out of secondary education due to financial and cultural constraints.

In addition, the USE programme caters for students who are able to score first and second grades in the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). As a result, a significant number of students do not qualify for the state scholarship. For example, of the 640,833 students who sat Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) in 2016, more than half (about 51 percent) did not attain first and second grades (UNEB, 2016),² and therefore did not qualify for the USE scholarship. This suggests that about one half of pupils who sit PLE may not transit to secondary school due to financial constraints. Also, there are not enough places for all the pupils who are able to score the maximum

permitted aggregate of 28 and below (the qualifying marks, with the lower numbers representing the best scores). For instance, in 2016, at least 315,187 pupils scored first and second grade on the primary leaving examinations (PLE); however, based on the Education Management Information System (EMIS) data, only 220,630 (about 70 percent) of these were enrolled in Senior 1 on a USE scholarship in 2016 (MoES 2016). In addition to access, the quality of USE schools has remained low in Uganda. These key access, equity and quality issues are what the PPP, and PEAS’s involvement in particular, are aimed at addressing.

PEAS Programme

The PEAS programme started in 2008 in Uganda. The PEAS intervention aimed to substantially increase the number of secondary schools targeting the remote and hard to reach areas and is currently running 28 schools in Uganda. The PEAS schools target vulnerable groups such as the disabled, orphans and child mothers. PEAS uses a ‘SmartAid’ model that emphasizes financial independence of its schools within two years of establishment. School-level financial sustainability is expected to be achieved through collection of school fees, receipt of USE payments, school-led income generating activities, and sound financial management. In addition, PEAS uses a two-pronged school support and supervision model to empower school leaders while also building their capacity and holding them to account. The support and supervision model is flexible and is adjusted to cater for differing school situations and needs. The model aims at enhancing education quality in PEAS schools.

Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) evaluated the impact of PEAS intervention on education access and quality. The research questions were: (i). what is the effect of PEAS intervention on equitable access to secondary education and education quality? (ii).What are the pathways through which PEAS intervention affects education quality?

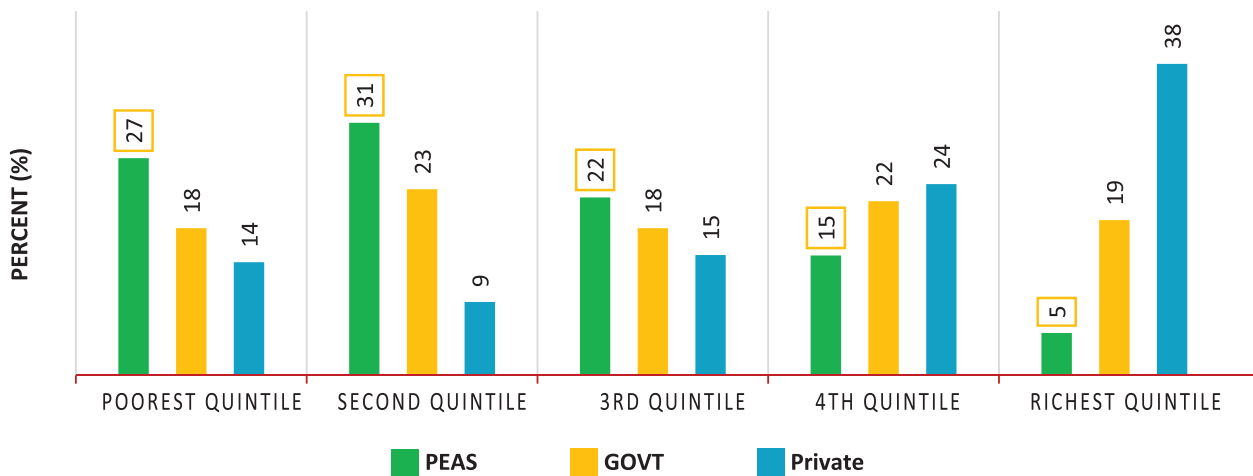
Peas Intervention and Access to Secondary Education

The study found that students in PEAS schools are from poor families compared to those in government and private schools. Figure 1 indicates that the largest percentage (58 percent) of students in PEAS schools are from the lowest two quintiles of the asset index³ (poorest 40 percent) while only five percent (5 percent) are from the highest wealth quintile (richest 20 percent). On the contrary, 62 percent and 41 percent of students in private and Government schools are from the two highest (richest) quintiles. These results suggest that PEAS schools provide an opportunity to students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds to access secondary education. This is largely because PEAS schools are located in remote and poor communities.

The examination of the academic background of students indicates that PEAS schools admit weaker students compared to other schools. The analysis of the performance in national primary leaving examinations (PLE) reveals that, overall, students in PEAS schools had performed worse at PLE-level than those in non-PEAS schools (Figure 2, Panel A). For instance, 27 percent of students in private schools and 8 percent in government schools came in first grade, while 6 percent of those in PEAS schools obtained a first grade. Conversely, about 31 percent of students in PEAS schools came in third and fourth grades (the lowest grades) compared to 28 percent of students in government schools and 15 percent in private schools respectively. These results indicate that PLE performance of students in private schools is much higher than that in Government and PEAS schools, and that PEAS students trailed others in overall performance.

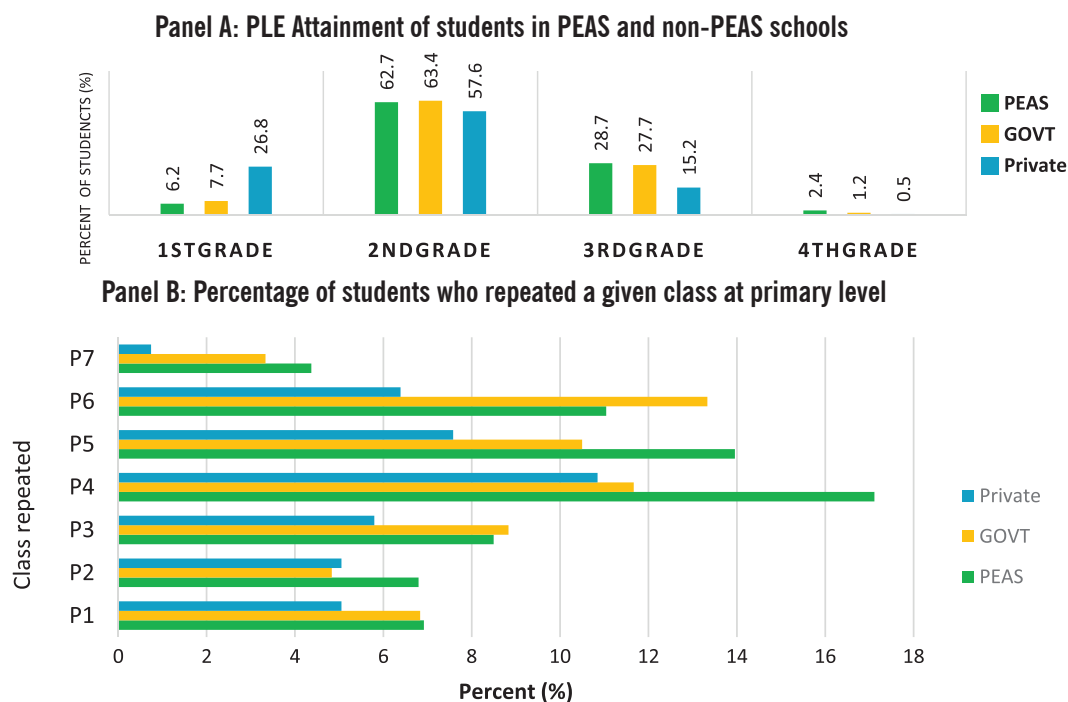
Using another indicator of performance at primary level, grade repetition per class, shows that PEAS students are more likely to report grade repetition than non-PEAS students (Figure 1, Panel B). The findings on grade repetition corroborate the overall performance of PEAS students in PLE, and further highlight that PEAS students

Figure 1: Percentage of students falling in a given wealth quintile



Source: Authors computation using PEAS endline survey data, 2017

Figure 2: Primary school-level performance of students in PEAS and non-PEAS schools



tend to enter secondary school at a disadvantage point compared with their government and private school peers.

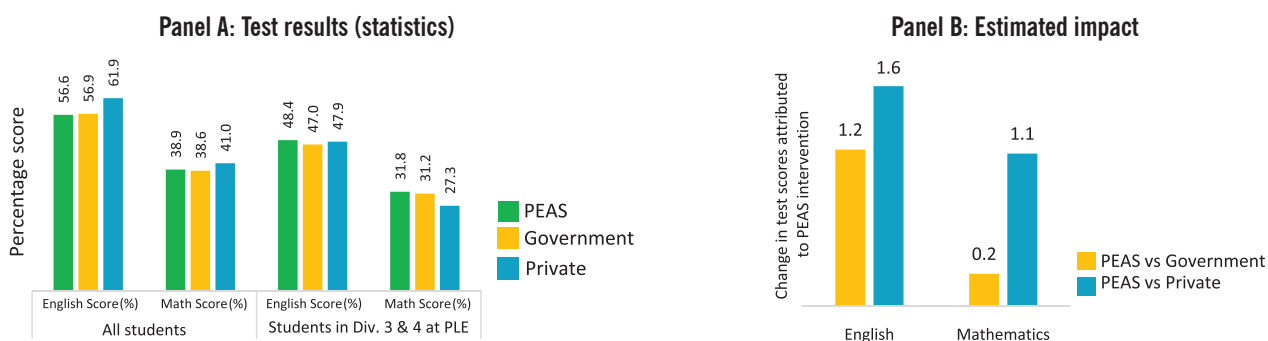
The admission of weaker students is because PEAS has a more relaxed cut-off points when admitting primary leavers. Indeed, government schools only admit those that scored 28 aggregates and below while PEAS schools allow those with 30 aggregates. Also, PEAS schools are able to take on students from poor families because they are located in hard to reach areas where poverty levels are high.

Peas Intervention and Education Quality

To analyse the effect of PEAS intervention on student education performance, we used National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) test scores. During data collection, the survey teams worked alongside the Uganda National Examinations Board’s staff who

administered standardized tests in English and mathematics to 25 randomly selected students in each class of S1, S2 and S3, in each of the surveyed schools. The tests covered different aspects of class-specific curriculum to measure academic achievement. The results indicate that PEAS schools performed as well as other schools (Government and private schools). Given that PEAS schools had admitted academically weaker students, these results suggest that PEAS improved student performance. For example, the test results indicate that overall, students in PEAS schools performed as well as those in government schools and slightly below those in private schools. However, when we look at students that had scored 3rd and 4th grades at PLE, those in PEAS schools out performed students in private schools (Figure 3, Panel A). The regression results show positive differences in test scores between PEAS and non-PEAS students. The gain (percentage points) attributed to PEAS intervention is significant in the case of English (Figure 3, Panel B).

Figure 3: Effect of PEAS programme on student performance



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Pathways through which the PEAS intervention affects academic performance

The analysis shows that there are significantly higher test scores in schools that have a clear vision, more internal school inspections, effective and functioning parents-teachers association, student protection policies, a higher number of teachers (teacher-student ratio), and more teachers who have studied up to degree-level and beyond, and where schools have a higher proportion of full-time staff. A school having ‘a clear vision’ is essentially a proxy for effective school management and leadership. Schools with a clear vision mean school leaders know what the intended outcome of education at their school is, and how to go about achieving this, and put plans into effect.

Specifically, having a clear vision for the school is associated with 6 to 10 percentage points higher test scores. An increase in the number of inspections (by internal inspectors, not by government inspectors) by 1 in 2016 was associated with 6 to 8 percentage points higher test scores. Inspectors identify areas of strength and weakness in the school and provide leaders and teachers meaningful feedback to improve performance. Also, students in schools with functioning PTAs have higher Mathematics test scores than those in schools without functioning associations. The statistics show that more PEAS schools had functioning PTAs, clear vision and more inspections than other schools. This might partly explain why there was improved performance among PEAS students. In addition, the results indicated that students in schools with electricity had higher test scores than those without electricity. Electricity is crucial for studying during the hours of darkness, including doing homework and general reading, which might explain why the availability of electricity has a positive and significant relationship with student performance.

Teacher welfare and the relationship between school management matter for student performance. The results showed that an increase in the percentage

of teachers that report to be having good welfare at school by one (1) is associated with an increase in English and math test scores by 8 and 9 percentage points respectively. On the other hand, we found that a one percent increase in the number of teachers that report to be having a good relationship with the school management is associated with 3 percentage points increase in Maths test scores.

Conclusions and Policy Action Recommendation

Although PEAS schools take in much less advantaged students in terms of prior learning attainment, they effectively level the playing field by bringing up average attainment to the same level as more advantaged and higher achieving students in government and private schools. The pathways through which PEAS intervention affect education quality include increased school inspection especially by internal inspectors enhanced by the functioning parents-teachers associations; enhanced students welfare through child protection policy; teacher motivation through in service training and timely salary payments; and low teacher absenteeism. We recommend the following policy actions for strengthening access to quality education:

- Government should establish partnerships with effective and efficient private players to promote education access and quality.
- Government and private schools need to strengthen school leadership through re-instituting parents-teachers associations to enhance school inspections and promote teacher accountability mechanisms.
- Enhance both internal and external inspections.
- Conduct in-service training to equip teachers with the up-to-date teaching techniques and knowledge.
- Motivate teachers with both better and timely pay.
- Formulate and enforce child protection policies especially those that guard girls from sexual harassment and student abuse to enhance their safety.

Endnotes

- 1 Evaluation of the Peas Network under the Uganda Universal Secondary Education (USE) Programme. Endline Evaluation Survey Report. Economic Policy Research Centre (2018).
- 2 Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) (2016). Statement on release of 2016 UCE Examination, Kampala, UNEB
- 3 The assets used include : whether the household has access to electricity or solar, owns a refrigerator, television, radio, mobile phone, whether

the source of drinking water is either a protected borehole/spring or tap, whether the toilet facility is a ventilated improved pit latrine (VIP), flush toilet, whether the household owns a vehicle or motorcycle. We also included parents' education indicators in the factor analysis. These are whether the father and the mother attained education level above senior six. Using these factors we generated quintiles to determine the relative wealth/asset ranking of the students.

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