

Assessment of the level of access to University Education by students from rural secondary schools: A case study of Kasese District in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the level of access to University Education by students from rural secondary schools in Kasese district. The research examined the extent to which studying from rural secondary school provides an opportunity or hindrance to access university education. The study used a descriptive study design on a sample of 98 respondents. Data were collected using questionnaires and interview guides and were analysed using frequencies and percentages. The findings revealed that there was low level (23%) of accessibility to university education by students from rural secondary schools in Kasese District. In conclusion the results from this research showed that there was low level of accessibility to university education by students from rural secondary schools in Kasese District. This study recommends that educationists should advocate for distance education learning especially for students located in rural districts. And for this to be successful, student's attitudes also need to change that university education can also be accessed from private universities because they are also recognized by National Council for Higher Education.

Keywords: University, education, students, rural schools and Kasese district.

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, higher education has given ample proof of its viability over the centuries and of its ability to change and to induce change and progress in society [1, 2]. Universities all over the world have the primary objective of imparting knowledge through teaching, research and community service [3]. In Sub-Saharan African countries, higher education has been recognized as the pre-requisite for an investment in human capital and economic development for both African young people and the entire society [4]. A recent report asserts that Africa records the highest level of return to investments in higher education with about 21 per cent [5]. It has further been argued that higher education holds the potential for nurturing the less developed economies and

attainment of equitable level of development for the marginalized and socially disadvantaged groups [6]. In 2008, about 223,000 students from sub-Saharan Africa were enrolled in tertiary education outside of their home countries, representing 7.5% of the total global number of students who study outside of their home country. In Africa, between 2000 and 2010, higher education enrollment more than doubled, increasing from 2.3 million to 5.2 million [4, 5, 6]. Nevertheless, university enrollment rates in sub-Saharan Africa are among the lowest in the world. There is also overcrowding in lecture halls at some Africa universities with an average of 50 percent more students per professor at African universities compared to the global average [6, 7].

The study reviewed literature regarding the level of access to university education, type of discipline undertaken by students, type of university (public or private) and learning style undertaken (classroom or distance learning). Higher education in Uganda refers to all forms of training beyond a full course of secondary level [8, 9]. National Council for Higher Education defines higher education as the education offered to post advanced level certificate or its equivalent. This is the context with in which this study is prepared though it is generally premised on university education [10]. Although participation rates in higher education across the world have improved, inequality (in connection with parameters such as disability, socio-economic class, race, gender and location) remains rife [11]. Universities are at the apex of higher education institutions. They are authorized by law to award degrees, diplomas and certificates. Degree programs are offered only in universities where students complete a 3-5 year program with minimum standards. Colleges and other tertiary institutions offer diplomas and their programs usually last 2-3 years, [12]. Their main distinguishing characteristic is that they create new knowledge through research and publication. In addition they are expected to engage with the community around them in terms of passing on knowledge, skills, and rendering services to community [13]. However, when such issues are put in context of Kasese District, students from rural secondary schools have indeed been disadvantaged in accessing university education.

In the last two decades, Uganda has experienced dramatic expansion of university education. The number of entrants to institutions of higher learning has increased from the Gross

Enrollment Ratio of 2.5% in 2003 to 6% in 2012 [14]. During the same period, there has been substantial establishment of universities, increased decentralization of university education through distance education and study centres with establishment of more than 42 universities throughout the country [13]. Despite the above developments aimed at absorbing growing number of university applicants, few students from rural secondary schools join university education compared to those in urban areas. University education also continues to be the preferred option for higher education compared to colleges and institutes. In the same report under the same period, there were 2099 programmes offered in higher institutions of higher learning where over 1105 were in universities. In the same period, of all the universities that existed in Uganda, only 6 existed in western Uganda where overall, universities contributed only 34% of the access to higher education. Therefore, this means that access to university education is still accessed by limited population of those who would be interested in it. Of the overall university enrollment in 2011, 21.8% were at first degree level followed by master's degree i.e 11.1%. The universities were also found to be providing 9.7% undergraduate diploma and ordinary diploma programmes though according to NCHE, diploma provision should be a preserve for other tertiary institutions. The university is supposed to concentrate on degree programmes, research and publication. Although, there has been argument that diversification of schedule of programmes by universities would improve access to students from upcountry areas, only 4.3% of students at undergraduate and 0.6% at postgraduate programmes [14, 15, 16]. This means that students from rural areas like Kasese district may still not be accessing university education due

to many other factors other than the distance factor.

There are three main avenues for entering the university system. In the first, secondary school graduates with two principal passes in the University Advanced Certificate of Education Examination (A-levels), can be admitted directly into the university. In the second avenue, holders of diplomas (from the vocational education system) are “considered” for entry and may be admitted depending on the “quality” of their performance/pass at their previous institutions. Third is the “mature entry scheme” for lifelong learners and adults who missed the opportunity for direct entry through the formal school system. The state reserves 4,000 positions annually for students admitted into the five public universities for whom the government provides scholarships. The system is merit based. Students with the highest grades are admitted with scholarships based on the individual requirements of the institutions and the faculties where the students are to be based. A quota system was introduced for the best students in each district, persons with disabilities, and athletes of both sexes who meet the minimum requirements

of specific institutions and programs [15, 16, 17]. However, it should be noted that the state scholarship (in terms of government scholarship, quota system, affirmative action continue to favour students from well to do families or well connected to access university education hence leaving the poor students from rural secondary schools to seek alternatives to higher education. Students who do not qualify for government sponsorship pay their own fees at public institutions (if they are admitted), enter private universities, or enter other tertiary institutions. The competition for state scholarships is therefore very keen and mainly favors children from the higher socio-economic strata whose families can afford good secondary schools. Government-sponsored students receive “free” university education including tuition, housing, and meals. Additionally, because of the merit-based entry mechanisms, these students are admitted on a preferred basis to professional courses such as law and medicine. This preference further contributes to the divide between the urban rich and the rural poor [18, 19, 20].

Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to evaluate the level of accessibility to university

education by students from rural secondary schools in Kasese District.

Research question

- i. What is the level of accessibility to university education by

students from rural secondary schools?

Geographical scope

Kasese District is located along the equator. It is bordered by Kabarole District to the north, Kamwenge District to the east, Rubirizi District to the south, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west. It is estimated that in 2012, the population of the district was approximately 747,800 people (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [10]. There are 85 secondary schools

(22 Government aided, 33 private and with 30 under public-private partnership. There are 7 tertiary institutions (one university study centre and 6 colleges). Kasese District was chosen because of the researcher’s experience with the teaching and learning environment, most teachers in secondary schools come from other districts other than Kasese itself.

Time scope

The study focused on students at the university who finished Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education between 2014 and 2016. These included university students in year

one up to the fourth year. This time period was chosen because such university graduates know the factors that determined their access to university education.

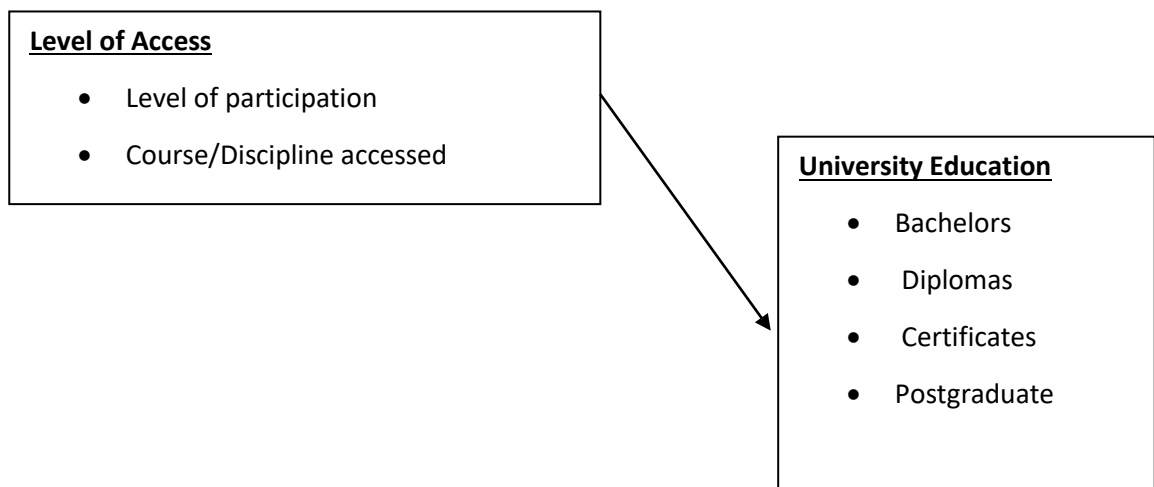
Significance of the study

The study might add more knowledge in the area of university education career management, financing and ensuring equity in access to university. The results of the study might be useful to schools and parents to improve on ways of career guidance for students. This is especially in choosing the university, the courses or programme to study. The recommendations may be used to stimulate policy debate among various education stakeholders in Kasese District on how to improve access to university education by students from rural secondary schools.

This eventually may help to identify solutions to the low rate of participation in university education by student from rural secondary schools in Kasese. The study might be used as a reference by the subsequent researchers who will come to study in the same area and under the same topic of access to university education. Study findings may be used by the community to understand some of the factors affecting students from rural secondary schools in attainment of university education.

Conceptual Framework

Accessibility to university education



(Source: Researcher, 2017 based on [17])

Figure 1: Conceptual frame work showing accessibility to university education by students from rural secondary schools

From figure 1, above access to university education is influenced by many factors. The framework considers access as ability of a student to join the

university and acquire skills such as technical, human, design and conceptual skills that would enable him or her to live in elite and non-elite

environment after study. When students access university education (i.e studying courses at degree, diploma or certificate level), it assumed that both students, parents or the family and the community benefit from the outcomes of that education. This is because university education facilitates acquisition of skills and knowledge that increase productivity, efficiency and quality of life. This comes as a result of university education increasing the value of the graduates in the labor markets by getting well-paying jobs,

earning high wages/salaries. Lack of access to university education by communities in Kasese District may result into; lack of trained professionals that spearhead socio-economic sectors' growth. Lack of opportunities to access university education may lead to under or undeveloped human resources, limited savings and low standards of living and loss of change associated with university education. This eventually leads to slow rate of modernization and development.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

A descriptive study design entailing collection of qualitative data on the selected variables was used. A descriptive research design observes, describes and documents aspects of a situation as it naturally occurs [21]. Descriptive research design was used because the researcher was concerned with describing affairs in as far as

accessibility to university education of students from rural Kasese District was concerned. The data collection and analysis were concurrently done as suggested by [22]. The mixed method was used because data collection procedure involved two types (questionnaire and interviews).

Area of study

The study was carried out in Kasese District in South Western Uganda. The population of Kasese was 702,029 people. Of this 51.7% (363,233) were females and 48.3% (338,796) were males. The population growth rate in Kasese District in 2014 was 2.45%. There are 140,697 households in the district with a household size of 4.9 persons which is higher than the national average of 4.7. The rural population consists of 529,976 or 75.5%

of the population while the urban population is 24.5%. In Kasese District, there are different ethnic groups like Bakonzo, Batoro, Basongora, Bamba and Banyarwanda [23]. Kasese district was chosen as a study area due to the factor that it is located far away from the Capital City Kampala with no university. Therefore the research was wondering how students from such an area really access university education.

Population of study

The population of the study was 146 including 128 students at the university, 10 head teachers, 3 registrars and 3 deans of students and 2 officials from the Kasese District Education Office. The district has five constituencies namely; Bukonzo East (5 government aided secondary schools),

Bukonzo West (4 Schools), Busongora North (10 schools), Busongora South (5 schools) and Kasese Municipality (3 schools). Thus, Busongora North with 10 government aided secondary schools became the sampled area because it had many government aided secondary schools. Due to time and cost

constraints, Busongora North was also selected because the researcher found it convenient to carry out the study on part of the population that was more

accessible. In these schools, the number of students at university in 2014, 2015 and 2016 was 128.

Sample size selection and sampling techniques

The sample population for the students comprised 113 sampled based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table used for determining the sample size for a given population. Thus, the sample size is 113 respondents including; 95

students at university, 10 head teachers, one D.E.O and one District Inspector of Schools, 3 registrars and 3 deans of students as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Population and the sample size selected for this study

Category of respondents	Population	Sample	Sampling technique
Students sent to university from ten rural secondary schools 2014, 2015 & 2017	128	95	Krejcie and Morgan table
Head teachers	10	10	Purposive sampling
University Dean of students	3	3	Purposive sampling
University Registrars	3	3	Purposive sampling
District Education Officials	2	2	Purposive sampling
Total	146	113	

Source: Head teachers of 10 secondary schools in Kasese District, 2017

Krejcie and Morgan tables were used to select a sample of 95 university students that studied from rural secondary school in Kasese district. The study also purposely selected 10 head teachers from Busongora North schools, 3 University Deans of Students and 3 Academic registrars, 2 District Education Officials due to their knowledge and experience in

interacting with students intending to join university education. In this case criterion purposive sampling was used where students at the university from Busongora North rural based secondary school were the focus. Criterion purposive sampling involves searching for cases or individuals that meet a certain criteria e.g have had a particular life experience as described by [24].

Data collection methods

The study collected data using interviews and document reviews. In-depth interviews were held with D.E.O, Inspector of schools, University Registrars and Deans of students from the three universities namely; Mountains of the Moon University,

Kampala International University (Western Campus) and Mbarara University of Science and Technology. The research chose the three universities based on (i) closeness to Kasese District (2) Private and public university.

Data collection instruments

Questionnaires

A self-administered questionnaire with mainly close and some open ended questions were used to collect data from students at the University hailing from Kasese District.

Data quality control

Validity of instruments

To ensure validity of research instruments; pilot testing of copies of questionnaire was carried out in two

$$CVI = n/N$$

CVI = $\frac{\text{Number of items rated as relevant}}{\text{Total number of items in the questionnaire}}$

Where: n = number of items rated as relevant

N= Total number of items in the instrument

This resulted into a Content Validity Index of 80%, meaning that the instrument was valid. Data collected was cross checked while still in the field to ensure that all questions were answered and contradictory information was removed.

Data collection procedure

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Post Graduate Directorate department of Educational Management and Administration to introduce her to the field. Afterwards, the researcher did a pilot testing of the research tools to check content validity. After corrections of any inconsistencies, the researcher went straight to the universities selected to ask the students at the university hailing from Kasese. In the field, the researcher introduced herself and purpose of the research to the different categories of

schools of Kasese District. This helped to assess the language clarity, ability to tap information from respondents, acceptability in terms of length and ethical consideration for clients. Supervisors were requested to rate the instruments in order to discover their validity. In order to establish content validity, results from the ratings were computed using the following formula.

respondents. The researcher distributed the questionnaires and there after conducted interviews with the respective categories. At the end of each day, the researcher did preliminary analysis of data gathered in order to check for inconsistencies

Data Management

Data processing

Data from interviews guides was group to mark the underlying ideas where similar kinds of data were grouped together to form categories and themes according to (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This was done by picking out ideas, concepts and themes into categories. Finally, triangulation was used to validate data from different sources and to corroborate findings. On the other hand, data from questionnaires was coded.

Data analysis

During data collection, at the end of each day, the researcher did preliminary data analysis for interviews conducted in order to check for inconsistencies. After field work, data from the questionnaire was read and reread to understand participants' perspectives about research issues. It

was then entered into the excel sheet and coded according to objectives. Then the responses were tabulated to create frequencies and generate percentages. The frequency tables, graphs and charts were used to present data and inferences made about the general population. Secondary data

from the district and university administrators was useful in validating

some of the respondents' responses.

Ethical considerations

The main ethical considerations were voluntary participation, obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and privacy of the respondents. The rights and the welfare of the respondents were protected. The researcher tried to minimize risks to respondents as much as possible. In

relation to holding interviews, the researcher felt the most important ethical considerations was to make clear instructions to the respondents that participation was entirely be voluntary, free to withdraw from the interview at any time and were kept strictly confidential by the researcher.

RESULTS

Response Rate

The researcher anticipated to collect data from 113 respondents including 95 for the questionnaire survey and 18 for the interviews. However, complete data was collected from 80

questionnaires and 16 interviews making a total response of 96. The response rate was as presented in table 2.

Table 2 Questionnaire response rate for the study

Instrument	Sample	Reached Respondents	Response rate
Questionnaire	95	80	84%

The data in table 2 shows that the questionnaire survey data was obtained from 80 (84%) respondents out of the originally selected 95 university students. This response rate was

considered sufficient because [25] proposes that a response rate of 50% and above is acceptable in social research surveys.

Category of the respondents

The researcher contacted different categories of respondents. This was done in order to get different views

from different people that have interfaced with university education as presented below.

Table 3: Category of respondents for the questionnaire

Category	Male	Female	Total
Students at the University	51	29	80
Percentage	64	36	100

Source: Primary data, 2017

Data was collected from 80 university students from Mountains of the Moon, Kampala International University-Western Campus and Mbarara University of Science and Technology. Table 3, shows questionnaire respondents based on gender. The

results showed that the large category of university students hailing from Kasese District are males 51(64%) with few or nearly half females 29(36%). This suggested that the larger percentage of the respondents were males. However, despite the males being the larger

percentage, the data collected was representative of both gender groups because the number of females was

equally high and they effectively participated in the study.

Table 4 Category of respondents for interviews

Category	Male	Female	Total
Head teachers	8	2	10
Academic registrar	3	0	3
Dean of students	3	0	3
District Education Officials	2	0	2
Total	16	02	18
Percentage	89	11	100

Source: Primary data, 2017

From table 4, results show that most males 16 (89%) compared to females head teachers and administrators are 02(11%).

Age distribution of respondents

An analysis on the age of the respondents was also done. The researcher considered the age level of the respondents in order to identify who participated in the study and the results are in the Table 5 here under.

Table 5 Age Distribution of University students

Age Groups	Frequency	Percent (%)
20 - 24Years	27	33.75
25 - 30 Years	43	53.75
31 - 35 Years	10	12.5
Total	80	99.63

Source: Primary 2017

From the Table 5, with regard to age groups of the respondents in years, the results showed that there is a good number 27(33.75%) of university students and a larger percentage 43(53.8%) was of the respondents who were between 25-30 years followed by 10(12.5%) who were above 31 years, This means that most of the respondents were above 20 years and therefore could easily reason on issues concerning university accessibility.

Table 6 Age distribution of Interview respondents

Age Groups	Frequency	Percent (%)
36 - 40 Years	8	44.44
41 - 45 Years	10	55.55
Total	18	99.99

Source: Primary data, 2017

The results in Table 6 indicate that the respondents in the age group of age group 36-40years were 8(44.44%), 41-45years were 10(55.55%), 26-30years. The results indicate that all the respondents were of competent age to

answer the research questions and therefore this gave the researcher to

consider the solicited views as valid and authentic in relation to the study.

Level of accessibility to university education

To assess the level of accessibility to university education, a number of questions were posed, level of education, type of school attended

(rural or urban) secondary school, category of course undertaken, type of university.

Level of education pursued

The students were also asked to indicate if they were either at degree or diploma studies, 31(32%) indicated they were undertaking diploma studies while 55(69%) were undertaking degree

courses. Majority of the students were at degree level. This means that given the opportunity, all students from rural secondary schools, they would obtain university education.

Number of university entrants

To understand the level of access the level of access to university education by students from rural secondary schools in Kasese district, head teachers were asked to tell how many

students sat A'level in 2014, 2015 and 2016 in their school. Then they were further asked how many joined the university. The results were as follows as presented in the table.

Table 7 University entrants

School	UACE Candidates between 2014-2016	University Entrants	
		Frequency	Percentage
School 1	43	10	23
School 2	50	12	24
School 3	73	15	20
School 4	79	16	20
School 5	44	12	27
School 6	63	13	21
School 7	64	18	28
School 8	58	14	24
School 9	31	9	20
School 10	45	9	20
Total	550	128	23

A total of 550 students from ten schools who had finished A'level in 2014-, 2015 and 2016 were sampled. Out of the 550 students who sat their UACE exams, only 128 (23%) had joined university according to the head

teachers and documents accessed from the schools. The 23% indicates that there is low accessibility to university education by students from rural secondary schools in Kasese district.

Category of Program taken

Students also indicated the category of program undertaken at the university. The research wanted to know if they students undertook sciences or Arts.

There are different disciplines preferred and undertaken by different students at the university.

Table 8: Category of Program taken

Arts Program	Frequency	Science Program	Frequency
Social Sciences	18	Technology	18
Business	32	Medical	12
Total	50		30
Percentage	62.5	Percentage	37.5

Source: Primary data, 2017.

From the above Table 8 Arts students at the university constituted 50 (62.5%). The results indicate that students at the university take various courses including both Arts and Science courses. Among the Arts courses included social sciences and business related. Most students were taking Arts related courses because they were the cheapest at the university and the points they had at entry level could enable them be admitted for such courses. However, all students were happy with the university education

being attained. On the other hand, 30(37.5%) students were taking science related courses such as medical and technology related courses like science education, medicine and surgery, laboratory technology, information technology, computer science, nursing and physiotherapy among other science courses. Whereas there is government drive is to promote science courses, results indicate that most students from rural secondary schools end up taking Arts related courses due to lack of required points.

Type of university attended

Each respondent was tasked to indicate the type of University attended. The majority of the respondents 56 (70%) were in private universities while 24 (30%) were in a public university. This means that most rural secondary school students attain university education from private universities or on private sponsorship. Results from the interviews with head teachers showed that most students wished to join public university even if they would be on private sponsorship, because it would be cheaper compared to private universities. At the same time, they think students from public universities

have an upper hand in getting jobs in public sector when applying for jobs in public sector. However, the 56 (70%) of the respondents also indicated their presence in private universities which have enabled them to access university education. An echo from interview conducted with District Education Officer indicated "that private universities equally offer quality education and their students rarely go on strikes unlike public universities. There is a lot of freedom at public universities and this sometimes leads to failure of some students to attend

lectures despite students at the

university being mature".

DISCUSSION

The results of the study were organized as background characteristics of the respondents, level of accessibility to university education from Kasese District. The results about sampled demographic characteristics show that male respondents were the majority while age groups of 25 - 30 years were the majority and students at the

university. The study triangulated views from different categories of respondents giving authenticity of the data as well as validity. The majority respondents were males because in most cases parents prefer to give priority for higher education to male child than girl child.

Level of accessibility to university education

In order to assess the level of accessibility, the study used five variables to measure the level of accessibility to university education. These were: level of access to university education, measured by study level and number of students from rural schools at the university, category of program undertaken, type of university and the learning style. Results indicate that there is low level of accessibility (23%) to university education by students from rural secondary schools in Kasese District and those who have accessed university education have obtained degrees. However, most students do not go to the university due to factors beyond their control such as failure to raise tuition or upkeep at the university, ethnic background, distance to the university and rural location. This finding is in agreement with what [26] says that there is continued inequality in access to university education across the world due to certain factors like disability, socio-economic class, race, gender and location although participation rates in higher education across the world have improved. Results indicated that most students from rural secondary schools who went to the university undertook business related courses compared to other disciplines. Reasons for many students from rural areas to take business courses were because they failed to raise the required points to be admitted for science related courses and on government sponsorships. Even when

the majority of the students from rural secondary schools were studying in the two public universities- Mbarara University of Science and Technology and Mountains of the Moon University, they were on private sponsorship. Due to poor performance of secondary schools in rural areas means many students fail to raise required entry points that so as to be admitted on government sponsorship. Thus, the only remaining alternative is to go to the university on private or self - sponsorship. This finding matches with what [27] says that in most cases mobilizing funds for tuition is difficult where funds are in most cases do not come from one family but several relatives and [28] says the tuition comes from 7-8 income earners according to the income per capita of Ugandans. Also the finding is consistent with [26] who say that education facilitates the acquisition of new skills and knowledge that increase productivity. This increase in productivity frees up resources to create new technologies, new businesses, new wealth eventually resulting in increased economic growth. The finding shows that majority of the respondents obtain university education in a Public University though a relatively less number are in Private University. This means that both universities provide education since they are credited by National Council for Higher Education. This finding confirms what [29] says that university education is no longer preserve of

government financing only following the establishment of many private universities. Majority students study by classroom than distance learning. This is because learning by class room makes it easy to access library, is inexpensive in terms of daily costs like transport and learning materials, offers opportunity to study well and understand concepts of the course taken, lecturers are able to attend to students well and students get time to socialize and make friends. There is also a strong relationship created between the learner and lecturers and lectures are well organized and ordered. However some respondents indicated that they preferred long distance education at the university because, it helped them to study while working. Such students also enabled students to work and generate own school fees. This finding confirms Dumba finding in 2013 that although, there has been argument that

diversification of schedule of programmes by universities would improve access to students from upcountry areas, only 4.3% of students at undergraduate and 0.6% at postgraduate programmes have been able to access university education through different programming like distance education. The finding further agrees with what [30] say that in Uganda distance education in public universities is relatively new and still developing capacity, education facilities and internet. At the same time, there are few lecturers with expertise in conducting distance education instruction and learning strategies. This is reflected in lack of quality leaning and instruction materials and lack of student support. The worst is that the Ugandan culture tends to be verbal or talking culture thus students feel pressure when they are expected to read and write for extended periods of time [18].

CONCLUSION

1. There is low accessibility to university education by students from rural secondary

schools in Kasese District both in public and private universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Educationists need to advocate for distance education especially for students located in distant and rural districts. And for this to be successful students attitudes also need to be changed that university education can also be accessed from private universities because they are also chartered by National Council for Higher Education.
2. The government should consider revising the policy of admission if access to university is to be increased for students from rural secondary schools. This should be done by either lowering entry points from

rural secondary schools or simply saying that government sponsorship is for students from such and such schools given the criteria. In other words, the schools should be graded so that students from first world schools should pay for themselves at the university because in most cases such students already come from wealthier families or well to do parents.

3. The government should endeavour to improve the education standards in rural schools by improving teachers' motivation through accommodation and other social amenities.

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