

Govt to revise automatic promotion under UPE

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KAMPALA. The government has agreed to revisit automatic promotion under Universal Primary Education (UPE) after researchers reported that the policy “defeats the purpose of education”.

A study commissioned by Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (Acode), a Ugandan think-tank, and conducted on its behalf by four academics, faulted the arrangement because “evaluation is one of the core aspects of learning”.

Dr Susan Kavuma, the principal investigator, said: “Automatic promotion should be qualified with 50 per cent pupil attendance if we are to get anything from UPE policy like other countries in the world that have embraced UPE and USE programmes.”

The government first introduced free primary education in 1997, and later followed it with Universal Secondary Education, but a combination of less-than-satisfactory education quality and low retention has alarmed educationists.

In the alternative, the researchers proposed that for automatic promotion to make sense, the government must set the minimum number of school calendar days that a pupil or student must attend to qualify to progress to the next class.

Former minister and ex-Makerere University Chancellor, Prof Mondo Kagonyera, said a declining quality of graduates should not surprise Ugandans because the seeds of poor academic

performance are planted in formative years of the learners.

“Automatic promotion discourages pupils from working hard because they are sure of [going to the next class]. This report gives insight into the reality on the ground and it should be fixed before things get out of hand,” he said.

The report titled, *Governance of UPE in Uganda and its Implications for National Development*, followed a study in 21 districts and it was launched in Kampala on Friday. The other researchers included American Professor Cunningham Kiran, Research fellow George Bogere and Dr Richard Sebagala of Mbarara University of Science and Technology.

They noted that automatic promotion does not give weak students a chance to improve or challenge themselves, yet it has failed to achieve the objective of its framers to help keep children at school.

Previous studies, including by both the government and non-governmental organisations, have found low literacy and proficiency levels amongst learners under free education.

“In order to improve the quality of Education in UPE schools, government is going to amend the policy on automatic promotion,” State Minister for Primary Education, Ms Rosemary Sseninde, said at the launch of the Acode report.

The minister said their internal studies have captured similar challenges of automatic promotion and, as such, they are going to revise the policy.

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