

## Abstract

# Access to Education and Reproductive Health: Evidence from Free Education Policy in Uganda

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Improving access to education is a key to economic development in Africa. Governments have attempted to make education more accessible by reducing user costs. However, rigorous empirical literature on the effectiveness of such attempts is particularly scarce. Thus, this dissertation aims to bridge the gap in the literature, examining the free education policy of Uganda in terms of its effects on education and health outcomes.

The present examination of the effects of free secondary education on students' access, student body composition, learning environment, and achievement indicates that it is effective in boosting secondary school graduates. It also emphasizes that private schools play an important role in expanding access. Although the fall in average test score of 11th grade students was achieved by those in the participating private secondary school mostly, this was likely due to the change in the composition of the students taking the exam, and free secondary education had few negative effects on the academic achievement of students in traditional secondary schools that existed prior to the program.

The non-monetary benefits of free primary education for females are also examined here in the context of reproductive health. The analysis reveals that an increase in years of education effectively reduces the probability of adolescent pregnancy. Furthermore, the findings suggest that educated mothers make more effective use of delivery and neonatal care, resulting in lower infant mortality rates.

The primary policy implication is that the USE is a welfare improving measure, in that it increased the number of secondary school graduates with few negative effects on their academic achievement in traditional secondary schools, and that it allowed more students to complete secondary education in new secondary schools. A secondary implication is that the benefits of a free education policy are not limited to educational attainment, but also extend to a reduced risk of adolescent pregnancy and healthier babies. This underscores the importance of considering the widespread benefits of female education in shaping policy and institutions influencing educational attainment.