

## **Educational Governance and Compliance: An Assessment of Adherence to Uganda's Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards in Mbarara City**

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### **Abstract**

*This study assesses the governance dynamics influencing the effectiveness of school inspections in enforcing the Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards (BRMS) in Mbarara City, Uganda. Using quantitative from the Inspections Assessment report and qualitative data gathered from education officials, school leaders, and community stakeholders, the study highlights important governance issues compromising the inspection regime including weak institutional capacity, limited inspector autonomy, insufficient resource allocation, and poor stakeholder involvement. According to the findings, shortcomings in internal school governance and lack of transparent dissemination of inspector's findings undermine accountability and harm educational quality. Nestled within the broader framework of governance, the study underlines the need of enhancing regulatory control, empowering local governance organizations, and promoting community participation to raise compliance and service delivery. The paper concludes with pragmatic recommendations designed to improve governance mechanisms so that school inspections might be effective tools for ensuring equity and quality of education in Uganda and other decentralized educational systems of a similar nature around the world.*

**Keywords:** Governance; School Inspections; Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards (BRMS); Educational Quality; Accountability; Regulatory Enforcement; Mbarara City

### **1.1 Introduction**

Education is a cornerstone of national development and democratic governance, serving not just as a tool for personal empowerment but also as a means of state-building, social responsibility, and civic participation (Timidi & Okuro, 2024). In Uganda like other developing countries, the effective governance of the education sector is central to realizing these objectives. In the context of education, governance is the set of structures, procedures, and customs that define how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are made, and how stakeholders are held accountable in the delivery of the education (Elfert & Ydesen 2023).

The Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) developed the Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards (BRMS) as a legislative framework to guarantee quality and fairness in the delivery of basic education (BRMS) of 2009. These standards provide for physical infrastructure, curriculum implementation, instructional staff, learner welfare, and institutional governance. To evaluate conformity to these criteria, the Education (Pre-Primary, Primary & Post Primary) Act (2008) mandates regular school inspections. School inspections theoretically serve as tools of

regulatory governance. They aim to enforce compliance, promote transparency, and stimulate changes in school management and learner outcomes (Ramadan & Ismail 2023).

Empirical evidence, however, points to a persistent gap between policy and practice. Research on education governance in sub-Saharan Africa show the prevalence of regulatory failures, poor institutional capacity, low public accountability, and low citizen participation in school oversight (Ahmad, et al 2004; Baghdady & Zaki 2019; Asongu & Odhiambo 2020). These governance deficits have profound implications for the quality of basic education in Uganda, where audit and inspection findings regularly expose non-compliance, resource mismanagement, and unsafe learning environments (Auditor General 2023).

This paper is grounded in the idea of governance as a mechanism of institutional performance and responsibility. It is largely based on City Education Office inspection activities among Mbarara City schools. Through a governance perspective, the paper emphasizes how institutional monitoring, regulatory enforcement, stakeholder involvement, and school-level leadership help to shape educational outcomes.

The findings will contribute to scholarly and policy discussions on educational governance in decentralized contexts, aligning with more general frameworks like the Local Government Act (1997) and Uganda's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), which stress decentralization, community participation, and performance-based accountability.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The study aims especially to address the following questions: To what extent do schools in Mbarara City follow the Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards? Which elements connected to governance affect non-compliance and compliance? How can local education governance structures be strengthened to ensure better accountability and quality assurance?

## **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

This work is rooted in theories of institutional and regulatory governance as well as principal-agent theory. These theories help to explain compliance behavior and the effectiveness of educational institutions under decentralized governance systems. This implies that compliance with educational policies like BRMS is not merely a technical exercise, but a reflection of how institutional norms, legitimacy, and accountability pressures operate within school environments.

Institutional theory holds that organizations including schools are embedded in a network of formal rules, norms, and expectations that shape their structure and behavior (Scott, 2013). Schools may use BRMS not only to satisfy technical requirements but also to get legitimacy in the perspective of the Ministry of Education and stakeholders including parents, sponsors, and the community.

Regulatory theory holds that by means of inspections, penalties, and incentives, states and their representatives enforce compliance, control conduct, and guarantee quality service delivery (Braithwaite, 2008). School inspections are a means of regulatory control used to ensure institutions meet given minimal standards.

The principal agent theory serves to explain the delegation of power from principals' government and legislators to agents' school managers, inspectors, and local education authorities (Miller, 2005). Often resulting from poor monitoring, information asymmetry, or contradictory incentives, non-compliance in Mbarara schools can be regarded as a failure of the agent to satisfy the expectations of the principal. Although SMCs and PTAs are meant to be localized monitoring agents, it is possible that may lack knowledge, capacity, or interest ultimately weakening the accountability loop.

Decentralization theory emphasizes the movement of administrative, financial, and political authority to lower levels of government to increase responsiveness and responsibility. By use of school management committees and district-based inspection, Uganda's educational system has embraced decentralization. The decentralization framework clarifies why local-level dynamics such as leadership capacity, citizen involvement, and inspection logistics greatly affect policy implementation outcomes.

These ideas taken together concepts taken together provide a comprehensive lens through which one can view the findings. The combination of these theories reveals how institutional constraints, regulatory shortcomings, and flawed delegation relationships collectively undermine efforts to guarantee compliance with BRMS in education institutions.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### *3.1 Research Design*

This study used a descriptive cross-sectional design combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This design allowed for the systematic capture of governance and regulatory practices at a specific point in time while allowing a better knowledge of school-level governance structures, inspection systems, stakeholder roles, and regulatory enforcement.

#### *3.2 Context and Study Area*

Mbarara City, a fast-urbanizing center in southern Uganda, operates under a decentralized governance framework. The local government manages education service delivery at the city level. The major guiding laws and policies are the Local Government Act (1997) and the Education Act (2008). In close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), the City's Education Department oversees school inspection and regulatory compliance. The administrative system of the city and the variety of educational institutions make it a suitable case for exploring governance and compliance at the local level.

#### *3.3 Data Sources*

The study utilized both primary and secondary data. Secondary data came from the official inspection reports by the Mbarara City Inspectorate of Schools. The inspectors fully inspected 171 schools between February 3, 2025, and April 28, 2025, comprising: 157 main schools (63 government-aided and 94 privately funded); Ten secondary schools (four private and six government-aided) and four certificate-awarding institutions two government-aided and two privately sponsored.

These reports assessed compliance with BRMS across several benchmarks including: Physical infrastructure; Sanitation and learner welfare; Teacher qualifications and deployment; Teaching and learning resources' availability and institutional governance and management.

Primary data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with actors engaged in or impacting school governance and compliance gathered primary data. Among the responders were: School inspectors (regulatory agents) (2); Head teachers (institutional leaders) (5); Local education officers (government officials) (1); School Management Committee (SMC) members (community oversight actors) (5); Civil Society Organization (CSO) activists (advocates for accountability and educational quality) (2). These interviews enhanced the analysis by offering perspectives on policy bottlenecks, regulatory enforcement, accountability gaps, and stakeholder participation in the education sector.

### *3.4 Sampling*

Respondents for the KIIs were also purposefully chosen depending on their roles, experience, and direct involvement in governance, inspection, or civil society oversight. Five education institutions—government (3) and private (2)—were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. A total of 15 interviews were conducted.

### *3.5 Data Analysis*

Quantitative data from inspection reports was analyzed to derive percentages related to degrees of BRMS compliance in several important areas. Data were organized and presented in terms of percentages. Thematic analysis of qualitative data from the KIIs was done. This was guided by governance frameworks that examined: Compliance mechanisms and regulatory enforcement; Institutional accountability and transparency; stakeholder engagement and challenges of implementing decentralized education governance. This mixed-method approach ensured a thorough knowledge of both compliance patterns and the governance environment shaping them.

### *3.6 Ethical Considerations*

Ethical approval for this study was secured from the Mbarara City Clerk's Office. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. The study maintained basic ethical standards like respect of persons, confidentiality, voluntary involvement, and transparency. Given the focus on governance, special attention was given to protecting the respondent identities and guaranteeing ethical reporting of findings.

## **4.0 Findings**

This section offers empirical findings of the study of school inspection records and qualitative data gathered by means of key informant interviews. The results are structured around the degree of compliance with Uganda's Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards (BRMS), the governance factors influencing compliance and non-compliance, and the operation of local education governance structures under a decentralized management system.

#### *4.1 Compliance with BRMS Standards*

55% of Mbarara City's schools met at least 70% of the BRMS criteria, according to the study findings. Public schools outperformed their counterparts' private ones particularly in governance-related areas including record keeping, policy adherence, and functional School Management Committees (SMCs) in primary schools and Board of Governors in secondary schools.

"Some schools neglect the BRMS since no effective follow-up or disciplinary system exists. The government issues a warning; but no real consequences- CSO Leader Mbarara City.

This highlights a governance deficiency marked by poor regulatory enforcement and insufficient sanctions systems which limits deterrence against non-compliance.

#### *4.2 Governance of Infrastructure and Facilities*

Only 47% of the institutions were found to have acceptable levels of physical infrastructure both in public and private sector institutions.

"We write reports, we inspect; seldom do we find any follow-up from head teachers. It seems the school committees and boards don't mind about inspection reports. Schools are advised to improve, but no system exists to guarantee compliance. -Technical Local Government Officer.

Staff housing revealed significant gaps; up to 70% of the schools lacked suitable housing for their teachers. Many of the current buildings were run-down and unusable. Teachers live far from their respective schools and their punctuality suffers particularly in bad weather.

"Sometimes the shortage of accommodation at the school causes late arriving and absenteeism among the teachers. It's even more difficult for female teachers since many of them struggle with the everyday travel over great distances. - Government School Head Teacher.

Teacher housing shortages in public and private educational institutions were similarly severe. The neglect to offer appropriate living quarters indicated structural flaws in infrastructure planning, interdepartmental collaboration and financial prioritization.

#### *4.3 Compliance with Teaching and Learning Standards*

Approximately, 70% of institutions satisfied BRMS criteria on teacher qualifications and curriculum coverage with public schools leading in compliance. Nonetheless, there were major problems with governance concerning: staff deployment; irregular preparation lesson plans and lesson plans; weak supervision and instructional oversight.

"Many school administrators don't supervise what goes on in classrooms. External inspection by itself cannot work without internal control. — Technical Officer in Local Government.

While most teachers including 82% in private schools were properly qualified, others lacked official contracts. This is especially so in private schools. This probably contributes to teacher turnover at private institutions which was high because school proprietors either delayed or denied paying teachers.

“Teachers in private schools suffer most. No contract; no work security; occasionally, no pay at the end of the month.” — Private School's Head Teacher.

Early Childhood Development (ECD) was supported by parents in many schools including public schools, but the Nursery Curriculum was not regularly followed consequently hampering the quality of basic learning.

Neglect of several disciplines including Music and Physical Education (PE) hindered compliance with curriculum implementation. Though 90% of schools included physical education on their schedules, only roughly half of lower primary teachers actively prepared or taught these lessons.

Instructional materials remain a major concern, with 72% of schools missing appropriate teaching tools, therefore limiting practical learning and rendering education essentially theoretical.

#### *4.4 Institutional Governance and Management*

Governance structures like SMCs and PTAs are largely dysfunctional. While most public schools have SMCs on paper, only 40% were completely active and functional.

“Some SMC members hardly even know what BRMS is. Even when we attend meetings, we are not empowered to offer monitoring and oversight. Most members are therefore ignorant.” SMC Member of a government aided primary school.

Another critical gap was record keeping. Just 25% of the schools kept accurate and comprehensive records. Many institutions either gave contradicting information or lacked required records. In records management, capacity-building clearly was needed in all educational institutions be it public or private.

As regards presence, more than 90% of Head teachers were regularly present and exerted administrative authority. However, more than half of Deputy Headteachers were operating in acting capacities in government schools, therefore undermining internal leadership structures. In private institutions the practically daily presence of the owners of the institutions made the technical heads of institutions redundant and powerless.

Conflicts occasionally arose when committee members of the SMCs or boards were motivated by financial gain. Targeted induction seminars are therefore especially important since SMCs lacked a clear awareness of their governance responsibility.

"We need to keep educating and sensitizing new PTA and SMC members. Right now, some believe they are there only to sign cheques or oppose school administrators." — Technical Officer for Local Government.

While government aided schools had official PTA structures, the degree to which these were used varied. Budgetary constraints mostly caused minimal community participation in school events like academic days and national festivities.

#### *4.5 Transparency, responsibility, and feedback loops*

It is always expected that inspection findings are shared with parents and other stakeholders like teachers and the school management committee and parents' teachers' association meeting. However, study findings show that only 35% of schools systematically documented and responded to inspection findings. This limits both institutional learning and accountability.

"Inspection can be done but how useful is it? Inspection findings are kept in files. Parents don't know what's going wrong. In parents meeting they are never brought up for discussion. That limits the public pressure needed for schools to act."— Civil Society Education Advocate.

Inspection reports were seldom shared with communities, thereby reducing opportunities for social accountability and weakening the governance tenet of transparency.

#### *4.6 Capacity and Financial Restraints in Inspection Management*

With just three full-time inspectors covering 171 schools, Mbarara City's inspection capability is quite limited. This resource gap compromises inspection frequency, thoroughness, and follow-up.

"I don't think inspectors do a good job. At times in a year, they inspect once and even then, they are rushing and don't give time to each and every aspect including talking to all stakeholders. They deal with only the head teacher."— Head Teacher, Mbarara City.

Despite these constraints, school attendance improved, averaging 97% with only a 3% absenteeism rate. However, routine roll-call and attendance tracking was inconsistent, with only 80% of schools displaying daily summaries on noticeboards which is a requirement.

Efforts to create safe school environments were partially successful, with 60% of schools identifying and managing danger zones. Pupils were aware of unsafe areas, reflecting some success in safety education initiatives.

While Mbarara City has made progress in several areas of educational governance and BRMS compliance, our results highlight notable gaps—especially in infrastructure governance, instructional leadership, record management, community responsibility, and inspection capability.

### **5.0 Discussion**

The study results are discussed in this part using the lens of governance theory and educational policy studies. It emphasizes how underfunded, poorly organized, or detached from local stakeholders' inspection systems fall short in providing on its supervision and responsibility demands. The discussion explores themes of regulatory enforcement, internal governance, civic participation, transparency, decentralized state capacity, and equity.

#### *5.1 Regulatory Governance and Compliance Enforcement*

A pillar of regulatory control, school inspections help the state to track adherence to public education criteria (Okafor et al 2024). Low compliance with Uganda's BRMS especially in infrastructure and governance capability in Mbarara City reflects a structural weakness in enforcement. This captures

what Pritchett et al. (2013) define as isomorphic mimicry where formal guidelines exist but are not really enforced.

Inspectors' incapacity to enforce penalties exposes a classic principal-agent conundrum particularly with regard to non-compliant organizations. Agents, or local inspectors, lack the tools, political support, or authority needed to force principals schools into compliance. Thus, the main-agent paradigm clarifies the gap between the Ministry of Education and Sports (as the principal) and local inspectors, school managers, and governance organizations (as agents). Often lacking incentives for compliance, these agents operate under little supervision and have conflicting interests, which leads to inadequate responsibility and performance. The outcome is a diluted inspection system whereby actual school behavior is not much influenced by reports.

The respondents underlined even more how this discrepancy in enforcement reduces public confidence in inspection procedures. They noted that, without accompanying actual penalties or follow-up support, inspection results are sometimes interpreted as toothless statements. Lack of power, consistency, and tools required to cause significant behavioral change in educational institutions characterizes the inspection process.

### *5.2 Internal School Governance: Accountability and Leadership*

Findings revealed that internal governance systems including boards of governors and school management committees (SMCs) are either weak or ineffective especially in private schools. These structures are essential for localized accountability. However, many lack training, awareness of their responsibilities, or operational autonomy.

Governance theory emphasizes the need of horizontal responsibility (O'Donnell, 1998), in which system players watch and check one another. Without functioning internal governance or empowered SMCs, inspection recommendations sometimes backfire. Strong school management and participatory monitoring are, as De Grauwe (2007) contends, indispensable allies to outside audits.

Respondents pointed out that parents and communities are not contacted or informed about school choices, therefore compromising the governance ecology and highlighting the lack of real stakeholder involvement at the educational level.

### *5.3 Transparency, Social Accountability, and Citizen Engagement*

Transparency and open information flows are what make governance flourish. But the study found a notable discrepancy in how important stakeholders especially parents and community leaders were given access to inspection results. This undermines social responsibility, which is the capacity of people to hold service providers accountable.

Respondents reported that school communities are still uninformed of their school's compliance status and that inspection results are hardly displayed in public forums. This restricts the ability of people to challenge ineffective government or demand changes.

Experiences from Tanzania (Omary & Mapunda 2021) show that public discussion of inspection reports made available at community meetings transforms them into empowering tools. Lack of this kind of openness in Mbarara City compromises the legitimacy and responsiveness of government.



#### *5.4 Inspectorate Capacity and Decentralized Governance Failures*

The study revealed minimal staffing, chronic underfunding, and logistical constraints among Mbarara City's inspectors. These shortcomings lead to infrequent school visits and superficial monitoring, traits of a capability trap (Landry & Sterman 2017), in which institutions are saddled with requirements but lack the means to meet them.

The decentralization approach has transferred responsibilities without commensurate resources. This validates Lere's (2019) finding that asymmetric decentralization leaves responsibility gaps. Local inspectors battle to run efficiently without enough money, therefore compromising the goal of delegated oversight.

Respondents also pointed out that insufficient and weak cooperation between inspectorates and other local agencies e.g., public health, urban planning resulting in fragmented accountability and missed opportunities for overall service delivery.

Though meant to improve community oversight, decentralized governance systems such as SMCs and PTAs are mostly ineffective due to capacity gaps and low civic participation.

### **6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### *6.1 Conclusion*

Under a governance perspective, this study has critically investigated how school inspections help to enforce the Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards (BRMS) in Mbarara City. The results expose notable inadequacies in the regulatory governance system, underperformance of internal governance structures within educational institutions, and weak enforcement mechanisms with regard to capacity of inspectors. These shortcomings undermine the accountability, transparency and equity goals that inspections are supposed to accomplish.

From a governance perspective, the inspection system lacks effective oversight, participatory involvement, and resource support, resulting in superficial compliance and persistent quality differences in both public and private institutions. The lack of significant penalties and weak dissemination of inspection findings to local communities further diminish the potential of inspections as tools of social accountability.

The study validates more general issues in governance research about the challenges of decentralization without corresponding capacity building as well as the principal-agent dilemmas resulting from agents without autonomy or incentives to enforce compliance. Moreover, the limited role of School Management Committees and other local players play in school governance inhibits the bottom-up demand for quality education and reduces community ownership.

This study emphasizes how school inspections have to be part of a larger governance structure that promotes transparency, strengthens local institutions, and mobilizes community participation to fulfill their full potential in enhancing education quality and equity.

## 6.2 Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions, the following suggestions are meant to improve the administration of school inspections and BRMS enforcement in Mbarara City and in developing cities and municipalities having comparable background.

Inspectorate capability and autonomy have to be improved. To guarantee consistent and extensive school visits, government should provide the education inspectors enough financial and human resources. Clear legislative mandates and instruments to ensure compliance including penalties for non-compliance. Furthermore, crucial for inspectors in governance-oriented monitoring and community involvement are capacity building in governance and training.

Still another approach is improving internal school governance systems. To properly carry out their responsibilities, School Management Committees (SMCs) and Boards of Governors must be encouraged in their revitalizing and functional powers. This can be accomplished by means of providing training courses on roles, responsibilities, and responsibility for school leadership and governance entities. Encouragement of inclusive involvement of parents, teachers, and community members in school decision-making is equally vital.

Additionally, very important is the encouragement of social responsibility and openness. Mechanisms for prompt public dissemination of inspection results in easily available forms must be developed for parents, local officials, and civic society. There is also need for facilitation of community forums and feedback channels whereby stakeholders may address school performance and results of inspections. To support community monitoring, social accountability instruments including report cards or scorecards should also be included.

Enhancing decentralized governance and coordination by means of boosting interdepartmental collaboration inside local governments to support education oversight is also key. Furthermore, it is necessary to guarantee that devolved mandates are aligned with the allocation of corresponding resources to prevent capability gaps. Finally, to support monitoring and capacity building, cooperation among education authorities, NGOs, and community groups is absolutely necessary.

Finally, education institutions must nurture a culture of accountability, responsibility, transparency and continuous improvement in schools. School inspections should move from punishing checklists to developmental tools emphasizing communication, learning, and school improvement. Incorporating recognition and incentive systems will help to reward educational institutions that show governance compliance and creativity. Embedding inspection procedures and processes within a wider comprehensive governance framework that upholds transparency, participation, and responsiveness is equally crucial.

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