Keynote Address

Education Policy Reform as an Enabler of Student Success: The Kajubi Legacy

---

Professor William Senteza Kajubi
Fulbright Memorial Lecture, 2026

Delivered by

Mary Goretti Nakabugo, PhD
Executive Director, Uwezo Uganda

23 April 2026

Uwezo UGANDA

Your Excellency the Ambassador of the United States of America to Uganda

The Vice Chancellor, Makerere University

Management, staff and students

Educators and friends of education

A very Good afternoon to you all!

It is a great honour to stand before you today at my alma mater, for the Prof William Senteza Kajubi Fulbright Memorial Lecture 2026.

I thank the Vice Chancellor for honouring me with this invitation, and the College of Education, for the recommendation*.

We gather to honour the enduring legacy of Prof William Senteza Kajubi, a man who gave his life to education. Consistent with the words of Nelson Mandela that, 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world', Professor Kajubi believed that education is for everyone and that its purpose is to produce responsible citizens. A visionary educator, administrator, and policy architect, he dedicated over four decades to transforming education into a powerful instrument for national development and individual empowerment.

Today's theme, 'Education Policy Reform as an Enabler of Student Success: The Kajubi Legacy', gives us an opportunity to reflect on how Prof Kajubi's ground-breaking work continues to inform and challenge the education system to work towards meaningful student achievement and societal advancement.

Before I delve into education reform and policy work, let me begin by painting a picture of the man we remember today.

Born in 1926 in a rural context (Kireku Village, located in present day Mityana), Professor Kajubi rose from humble beginnings to become one of Uganda's most impactful educationists. In 1952 he became the first African Fullbright Scholar, nurturing what has become a deep and enduring partnership between Uganda (and Africa in general) and the United States of America in higher education and knowledge exchange. He served twice as Vice Chancellor of Makerere University and as Vice Chancellor of Nkumba University.

Most of all, he was a decent and inspiring human being. I joined Makerere University when Prof Kajubi had concluded his term of office as Vice Chancellor, but later in life I had the rare privilege of interfacing one-on-one with him when I began my doctoral research on student assessment. As my first key informant, he was kind, knowledgeable, generous and a true mentor whose insights shaped my understanding of how assessment can drive real genuine learning rather than rote performance. He went out of his way to recommend further literature that I hadn't yet come across.

Above all, Prof Kajubi's greatest contribution to education in Uganda has been his transformative work in policy reform, a legacy that has provided a strong and enduring foundation for our country's education system and its future.

Brief History of Education Policy Reform in Uganda and the Kajubi Influence

Prof Kajubi participated in the landmark 1963 Castle Education Policy Review Commission, which laid early groundwork for post-independence education. The Castle Commission was tasked by the central government to examine the content and structure of education, consider how it could best be improved and adapted to the needs of the newly independent country. The commission faced profound constraints, summarised in its own report as quoted in Evans and Senteza-Kajubi (1994: 130). **Surprisingly many of the constraints still exist to-date**!

> When over half the nation is illiterate and the people rightly clamour for education, when teachers are in short supply and inadequately trained, when government and industry demand trained recruits, when unemployment is widespread and increasing, when the nation is poor - what policy should the government pursue?

The Castle Commission reached a consensus in favour of expanding post-primary education to provide human resources and train teachers for both primary and secondary schools. This was key to enabling student success. Prof Kajubi's role in this commission helped ensure that education policy would deliver not just access, but real learning outcomes through the provision of sufficient and well-trained teachers. The focus was on quality improvement alongside quantitative expansion. Compare this to the present day where the education system has expanded drastically – at all levels, including universities – without matching expansion of human resources and infrastructure - thereby sometimes compromising the quality of graduates.

The report of the Castle commission (Castle 1963) formed the foundation on which Uganda's educational system was based during the first period after independence, until 1977, when another Education Policy Review Commission, chaired by Prof Ssenteza Kajubi (because of his track-record), was appointed to review the education system - but its report was neither published nor implemented due to the civil unrest that characterised the period 1978-1985 in Uganda*.
It was the leadership of the 1987 Education Policy Review Commission, which produced the 1989 Educational Policy Review Commission Report (NEPRC, 1989) (generally named the Kajubi Report after the Chairperson), that truly cemented Prof Kajubi's legacy. The report was one of the foundational documents of Uganda's recovery at the end of the twentieth century and had a strong influence on the Education White Paper of 1992. Both documents helped to set the agenda for educational development in the first quarter of the present century*. The resultant 1992 Government White Paper is still informing the education sector as the recent Education Policy Review Report by the Mushega-led Education Policy Review Commission has never been approved by Government to inform a new Government White Paper. This is how enduring the Senteza-Kajubi legacy has been.

The Kajubi Report was exceptional for its wide range of observations about, and proposals for, the educational system: but one of its key features was a vision of democratic education. The vision is especially evident in Chapter IX of the Report, entitled 'Democratisation of education', but is not limited to that chapter and permeates the whole report.
The main focus of this address is, first, to capture the key principles of the vision and the main policy proposals that emanated from them, and then, to consider their relevance to the present educational system in Uganda. I am going to look back at the Kajubi vision of 1989 for Uganda and ask, 'How far have we come?', 'Where are we going? How do these link to student success?'

The Kajubi Vision in 1989

An analysis of the Report shows that **Kajubi's vision of democratic education was based on two core principles. The first**, and the more obvious one, is that **education is for everyone**. The report states:

> The Commission is convinced that education is a basic human right of all Ugandans, regardless of their social status, physical form, mental ability, sex, age, birth place or ethnic origin (p. 110).

The second principle, less explicit in the report but equally important, is that **the purpose of education is to produce responsible citizens**. I shall mention some of the policy proposals that flowed from these principles.

In keeping with the first principle, the Kajubi Report endorsed the goal of universal primary education (UPE): but it went much further than this. It was very specific about various disadvantaged groups of children who would need special support to ensure that they could access and complete primary education. The largest of these groups was girls in general; others were children with disabilities of different kinds, children in nomadic and fishing communities – especially in Karamoja and the small islands – as well as orphans, refugees and child soldiers.* For different reasons, the Report also called for special support for gifted children to realise their potential. The proposals also went beyond formal education: the Commission was aware of the many children who, in existing circumstances, could not access or continue with formal education and of the many adults who, during Uganda's troubled past, had received little or none. Non-formal education programmes were needed, to complement the formal system and realise the goal of 'lifelong education'. The Report went to some length on the needs of these various groups and the support that the Government and other agencies should provide for them*.

The Commission also hoped that the curriculum of basic, formal education (both primary and secondary) could be made more socially inclusive by strengthening its vocational component and relevance to the labour market.

The **second principle – of education for responsible citizenship** – is reflected in several aspects of the report. One is the proposal that 'in future there would be greater participation of students, teachers and community members in management of educational institutions' (p. 110). This idea has no doubt encouraged the introduction of School Management Committees and of student councils in schools. In this area, Kajubi's thinking was consistent with that of his spiritual predecessor John Dewey – for whom the American tradition of school boards was of central importance in promoting a democratic culture. The Commission also hoped for a 'devolution of authority' to the district and local levels (p. 36). Another important proposal (which has not been acted upon) was for a scheme of 'community and national service for all youth', which would initially be a six-month requirement for those who are enrolled in formal education (pp. 34-35). A social reorientation was the goal, as the Report noted that 'the qualified person expects to be paid for his*/[he]r* learning without being accountable for *his/[her] productivity'* (p. 35). Many countries have run youth service schemes and, within Africa, Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps for tertiary graduates is a notable example. Other examples include Kenya, Botswana, Tanzania, Ghana, etc. Lastly, making the school curriculum more relevant to local issues was also seen as a means of promoting responsible citizenship.

Reflection on Achievements and Challenges

I now come to the difficult questions. Thirty-seven years later, how far have we come and what is our direction of travel? What does our present educational system look like, in relation to the Kajubi vision? Is it enabling every child's success?

What have we achieved?

Let me recognise first that there have been important achievements in line with the vision, especially in the first two decades after the Kajubi Report. In terms of access – a prerequisite to success*- a much larger proportion of children are now attending primary schools and the right to free primary education is inscribed in the Constitution and the 2008 Education Act. A start has been made also on making lower and upper secondary education accessible to students who meet the academic requirements but not the financial ones, through the Universal Post Primary Education and Training (UPPET) (launched in 2007) for lower secondary and vocational and Universal Post O Level Education and Training (UPOLET) (launched in 2012) schemes. In the system of admission to public universities, girls benefit from affirmative action*. Resources for Ugandan local languages as the languages of instruction in lower primary education have been developed to some extent.* Teacher recruitment and appointments are conducted by districts and municipalities. Primary schools are required to have School Management Committees (SMCs) and secondary schools, Board of Governors, with local community/parent representatives. Curriculum and assessment at the lower secondary level has been reformed to competence-based curriculum (CBC) to reflect the acquisition of skills rather than the cramming of facts. Other levels of education are also being reformed to ensure students acquire the life skills they need to thrive.

How have we gone astray?

Despite these significant achievements, the general direction of travel gives cause for concern. Educational priorities seem to be dominated by a new breed of technocrats whom I will call 'the tiger chasers', because of their fixation with the example of the 'Asian Tiger' economies – South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and so on. We have seen a return of the kind of 'modernisation' goals that were typical of the post-independence period (the 1960s and early 'seventies) but with the difference that eyes then were focused on the West and now they are turned to the East. Instead of the idea of 'take-off into economic growth', we now have ideas like 'modernising the infrastructure' and the 'demographic dividend'. But in both cases there is the same focus on the upper levels of formal education and science subjects, which supposedly produce skills needed for economic change, rather than the lower levels and arts & humanities. UNICEF estimates that, in the four financial years from 2017/18 to 2021/22, the share of Uganda's education budget allocated to secondary education increased from 4% to 21%, while the share for primary and pre-primary education declined from 51% to 34% (UNICEF, 2023).

In support of the first principle that **education is for everyone**, primary education in Uganda is neither free nor universal. From recent research by my organisation, we know that the managers of government-funded primary schools are charging parents for many aspects of their service, considering that the capitation grants are insufficient for their needs. Typically, there are examination fees and levies for building maintenance, which are virtually compulsory. Other charges include for such things as extra tuition, school meals and, increasingly, supplementary teachers. Supplementary teachers, paid from fees, now account for about 13% of all teachers in government-funded primary schools, and in the Central Region more than half of all primary teachers in government-aided schools (52%) are paid from fees paid by parents. This would also explain the variations in pupil-teacher ratios (PTR) across regions (e.g. 79:1 PTR for the northern region versus 34:1 for the central region because the central is able to hire supplementary teachers), (Uwezo Uganda, 2024, pp. 29-30).

Little wonder, then, that some parents have difficulty in providing a breakfast or clean uniforms for their children, or that children lose interest and drop out of our dilapidated and understaffed schools. In the words of Ssentongo (2021):

> It doesn't matter that they go to a school where laboratory tests are conducted on the blackboard. It counts not that they do their writing practice with a stick on a banana leaf or on the ground. No-one cares that you have to trek miles on bare feet to get to school. … All that the cannibal nation wants to hear are your grades (Ssentongo, 2021, p. 63).

For the disadvantaged groups that Prof Kajubi identified (e.g. girls in general; children with disabilities of different kinds, children in nomadic and fishing communities, the small islands – as well as orphans, refugees), dropout is even more likely. For girls in school, there have been some improvements, especially more effort to support their menstrual health needs. But for adolescent girls especially, insecurity and domestic duties continue to hamper educational progress* (Uwezo Uganda, 2025).

For children with disabilities, the system established in the 1990s has not been well maintained: few local governments have officers trained in special and inclusive education. Furthermore, the Government has no system of grants for orphans or for children with disabilities. The only grants provided to young people with disabilities are limited to those who are being trained for a livelihood – the message seems to be that it is only those who can be economically active that will receive help. Adult and continuing education is starved of public resources and diverted to the production of minor diplomas.

As for the purpose of education in the new dispensation, NDP III made this quite clear. It sought 'appropriate and adequate human capital' to facilitate 'increase in production, productivity and technological growth' (NDP, 2020, p. 165). It did acknowledge that basic education and 'tackling vulnerabilities' would help to lay the foundation for human capital, but that was a subtext. An improved quality of life was seen in strictly economic terms. There was no concept of the well-rounded citizen with values and skills or of individual creativity. As Ssentongo (2021) further puts it:

> Ensure that coursework and exams are well-designed to enable them to reproduce exactly what you gave them, nothing more. Don't think of courses like Philosophy. Robots don't need imaginative or critical thinking skills; neither do they need to learn to question people, knowledge and all else they encounter (Ssentongo, 2021, p. 83).

Or as Prof Kajubi himself puts it on why students go to school (and the loss of values) (Mugalu, 20 December 2009, Observer article)

> 'Many people nowadays go to school in order to acquire a certificate rather than the knowledge and values which schools should be providing. In the process, values are lost. That's how we train doctors who will demand money before carrying out an operation, and the patient can die before they receive the money underneath the table.'

Student success, in Prof Kajubi's framework, meant not just attendance, but meaningful outcomes: improved literacy rates, reduced dropout rates and pathways to secondary and tertiary education. Yet the reality today is that of overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources and low learning outcomes (e.g. Uwezo Uganda 2024 estimates 23% of Primary 7 learners are unable to read and understand a primary-two-level text). High dropout rates at secondary levels and mismatches between education and job markets are a reality – The Inter University Council of East Africa, in its study on employability readiness for graduates from Universities in East Africa 63% in Uganda lacked relevant skills such as communications and critical thinking along with technical skills to perform in their respective jobs (Nganga, 2014). The situation has not changed much since then. Even with the recent shift to competence-based curriculum, a 2022 Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East of adolescents, 13-17 years found only 3% in Uganda were proficient in problem-solving skills compared to 5% in Kenya, 8% in Mainland Tanzania and 14% in Zanzibar (RELI, 2023).

Renewing the Kajubi vision for Student Success

For the education sector, it is time to renew the Kajubi vision. This is necessary if we are to retain our humanity and the coherence of our national community.

On the one hand, we should apply ourselves to the unfinished task of making education universal. Essential requirements are to make pre-primary education accessible to all children, to increase the number of primary teachers on the government payroll by 50%, to remedy the shortages of primary classrooms and teachers in the Eastern and Northern Regions. These steps would make possible a more effective pedagogy in government-funded schools and parents would not have to pay for supplementary teachers or remedial teaching.

To facilitate more support and mainstreaming of children with sensory impairments, hearing and sight tests, hearing aids and optical services should be made available free of charge for children of school age. For children with physical handicaps, assistive devices should similarly be free of charge and the opportunities for mainstreaming improved. I appreciate this is not a simple matter and requires careful planning.

To strengthen the role of education in preparing responsible citizens, school management committees should be guided to prioritise the goal of enabling all the enrolled children to complete the cycle. This means showing moderation in the charges to parents, having regard for the circumstances of the poorer families and not suspending students because of non-payment of the charges. The tendency for these committees to imitate the profit-seeking practices of private schools should be checked and if possible reversed.

Student councils, already maintained at many schools, are useful for developing a sense of responsibility and experience of collective decision-making. Interactive pedagogy and encouragement of independent thinking in the classroom are also important influences for tolerance, recognition of different opinions and understanding of the social value of knowledge. The school cannot itself be a democracy: but it can foster values and attitudes useful for citizenship in a democratic society.

As I conclude, I would like, once again, to thank Makerere University for organising this memorial lecture to reflect on what Prof Kajubi stood for. Let us move from policy intentions to implementation, adequately resource policy implementation (e.g. prioritise education in national budgets), and measure success not by enrolment numbers alone, but by learning outcomes and values acquired and demonstrated by students/graduates*.

Thank you for this privilege to speak today. To Professor Kajubi: Your legacy lives on and your light continues to guide us. May you continue to rest in peace & power.

References

National Planning Authority (2020). *Third National Development Plan (NDP III), 2020/21 – 2024/25.* Kampala: Author.

Nganga, G (2014). Survey finds most East African graduates 'half-baked'. *University World News. www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20140523130246934 [accessed on 22.04.26].*

RELI (2023): Proficiency levels of adolescents in Life Skills and Values in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Regional Report.

Ssentongo, J.S. (2021). *What I saw when I died*. Kampala: Makerere University Press.

UNICEF Uganda (2023). *Sustaining the gains in the education sector: Uganda budget brief, financial year 2023/24.* Kampala: Author.

Uwezo Uganda (2024). *Are our children learning? Learning recovery and challenges for Uganda. Uwezo national learning assessment report, 2024*. Kampala: Author.

Uwezo Uganda (2025). *National Conference on What Works in Girls' Education: Breaking Barriers, Building Futures: Evidence & Action for Girls' Education. Conference Report.* Kampala: Author