

Developing human and social capital through the provision of non-formal education in Western Uganda: A pilot study

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Abstract: Since the middle of the last century, non-formal education (NFE) has been promoted as a complement to or substitute for formal education. Today it has come to define myriad programs that sometimes bear little resemblance to one another. This paper argues for the legitimacy of NFE neither as a complement nor a substitute but as an alternative to formal education. From the findings of a pilot study into four programs in western Uganda, NFE is presented as a viable alternative to formal education for its ability to develop social capital, necessary for building self-reliance in learners.

Keywords: Uganda, non-formal education, social capital, human capital, World Bank

JEL: I25, J24

1. Introduction

This article examines the potential impact of non-formal education (NFE) to provide employment and general self-reliance through the development of human and social capital in rural Uganda. This section provides some background on the history of formal and non-formal education in Uganda.

Popularly defined as “any organised, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children” (Coombs, Ahmed 1974: 8), NFE has had a long

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history in Uganda dating back to the traditional education systems in place before the arrival of Europeans. These traditional education systems have been described in the literature as NFE (Coombs 1976: 283). Education during that time was controlled by tribal elders and was intended to teach young people to be good citizens of their tribe (Ssekamwa 1997).

In the 1870s the King of Buganda invited European teachers to Uganda to educate a select group of boys within his family with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide a united front in preventing foreign invasion (Ssekamwa 1997). The first educators to respond to the invitation were missionaries from the Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations. Their efforts proved popular as indicated by a continual increase in the number of teachers and an expanding population of students beyond the palace (Tourigny 1979).

The growing popularity of these missionary schools altered perceptions on the value of the traditional system of education (Ssekamwa 1997). The early missionaries were of the opinion that there was no education system prior to their arrival and reinforced this opinion through their insistence on their educational model being the only appropriate one. Since that time, and especially following Uganda's annexing as a British protectorate in 1894, formal education has dominated the educational landscape. As formal education in Uganda became increasingly infused with European notions of modernity and the development of human resources as a precursor to economic development, the traditional NFE system continued to lose status.

As government capacity to fund educational development has improved and the Government of Uganda committed to the Millennium Development Goals, expansive efforts have been made to boost student enrolments across the primary, secondary and post-secondary sectors. Yet despite a dramatic increase in enrolment figures, questions have been raised over the quality of education being offered to this growing student population (Uwezo 2015). One study found that post-2000, the likelihood of a child educated under the universal primary education (UPE) program, successfully completing a standardised reading test was 10% less likely than under the previous system (Grogan 2006).

The objectives of UPE were for the government to cover the primary school tuition fees for four children in each family, improve school infrastructure, provide learning resources and increase the number of teachers being trained (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1999). In a space of four years (1995-1999) following the introduction of UPE, primary school enrolment almost tripled from 2.3 million to 6.5 million (Okou 2002). Primary schools were the main

beneficiaries of the average 6% increase in government spending on education (Stasavage 2005). But the necessary increase in trained teachers was not realized, especially in relation to the dramatic increase in student enrolments. So while great gains have been made in expanding access to formal education, the goal of making that access universal and of achieving good quality has remained elusive.

An unfortunate side effect of the implementation of UPE was that attention was diverted away from secondary education (Bush 2008). So in 2008 when the net primary enrolment rate stood at 80%, only 15% of the age-appropriate population was attending secondary school (UNDP 2008). As money was being directed towards primary education, it was being channeled away from secondary education. So in 2007 the Uganda Government introduced the Universal Post Primary Education and Training Program (UPPET). The aim of UPPET is to provide, “quality post-primary education and training to all Ugandan students who have successfully completed the primary leaving examination” (Lewin 2006: 10). This includes free tuition for secondary schools and other training institutions and has been most recently supported by a \$150 million loan from the World Bank (Bugembe 2009).

However, for all the gains made in expanding access to formal primary and secondary education in Uganda, there are still a large number of adolescents who have no access to the post-primary education offered through UPPET. Inclusion in UPPET is dependent upon successful completion of the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE). One study found that between 2003 and 2005 only half of the students who sat for their Primary Leaving Examination passed at a level acceptable for admission into post-primary schooling options (Forum for African Women Educationalists 2006: 10).

World Bank statistics for Uganda indicate that the retention rate of students from the first grade of primary school (Primary 1) to the final grade of primary school (Primary 7) is as low as 25% for both boys and girls (World Bank 2010). In its second Participatory Poverty Assessment Report, the Government of Uganda cited financial costs as the most common reason behind the low completion rate of students through the seven years of primary education (Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development 2002: 132). The figures decrease again when it comes to tertiary education with only 9% of people aged 19-24 enrolled in a tertiary institution (World Bank 2011). In spite of the small proportion of age-appropriate youth entering tertiary

education, the demand for jobs amongst graduates in the formal employment sector exceeds the supply.

One recent study found that from a sample of 1000 youth from across Uganda, 61.6% were not employed in the formal sector (AAU 2012). This means that the informal sector, which is largely unorganized and unregulated, and can be inaccessible due to the lack of start-up capital required, is supposed to provide employment for these job seekers. Furthermore, youth who have been trained in the formal sector have been trained to be job-doers not job-creators, and may lack the entrepreneurial know-how to establish an income-generating enterprise. In an effort to redress the fact that the education system in Uganda creates job-doers and not job-creators, the National Curriculum Development Centre developed an Entrepreneurship Education curriculum designed to run across the first four years of secondary schooling. The purpose of the curriculum is to “equip learners with the required skills for successful engagement in income generating activities” (National Curriculum Development Centre 2008: 8). A report on an earlier pilot of an entrepreneurship curriculum indicated that the inclusion of such a subject in the Ugandan secondary education system did not necessarily promote self-employment nor raise the profile of self-employment as a preferable option post-school (Farstad 2002: 63). Even if it were successful, based on the figures stated above, there are still a large number of young people missing out on secondary schooling. Given this situation, as mentioned previously, this article explores the potential impact of NFE to provide employment and general self-reliance through the development of human and social capital in rural Uganda. The research was guided by the following question: ‘What is the impact of NFE on the human and social capital outcomes of learners in one community in western Uganda?’

2. Theoretical considerations: NFE and social capital

Before outlining the research design and methods employed in the study from which this article is drawn, it is helpful to briefly discuss some of the theory relating NFE to the development of human and social capital. Human capital is an economic term referring to “human capacities” (Todaro, Smith 2009: 375) that impact upon productivity. The Poverty

Eradication Action Plan for Uganda for 2004-2008 attributes the accumulation of human capital via formal education as “essential for higher incomes and sustained economic growth” (Government of Uganda 2004: 153). This linkage was made by human capital theorists who argued that education builds human capital as it contributes to skill acquisition and knowledge accumulation which in turn increases productivity (Harbison 1971).

Formal education’s ability to build human capital in individuals is useful when, as Michael Fullan (2001) suggests, the moral purpose of education is to prepare individuals for employment in the formal workforce. In cases where demand for jobs exceeds supply, the alternative option for employment is in the informal workforce. Whereas employees find themselves as part of an existing network of colleagues, clients and suppliers, individuals in the informal workforce need to create these networks for themselves. Social capital provides a context in which to analyse a person’s relationships and the impact of these relationships on their productivity and the productivity of the communities in which they live.

Despite the promise of formal education, at present the formal education sector in Uganda is inadequate to provide for the needs of all young people. Although there have been dramatic increases in enrolment rates following the introduction of UPE, rates of completion and progression into secondary school remain low. With youth unemployment rates high, there is a need for an education that not only builds human capital but also builds the capacity of individuals to initiate their own income-generating activities.

The pilot study reported here investigates whether NFE has the ability to not only create human capital but also social capital. In creating both forms, the effect of their combination on the realisation of financial self-sufficiency for individuals is explored. In its earliest use, social capital was used to describe the goodwill that existed between people to be used in building communities (Hanifan 1916). It has since been developed to encapsulate the resources and benefits available to both individuals and communities. Thus, in contemporary theory, social capital describes the outcomes of a person’s relationships.

Michael Woolcock articulates the concept as including the sources and the outcomes (Woolcock 2001). Writing with human development in mind, Woolcock argues that social capital is multi-dimensional, that different combinations of these dimensions produce different outcomes and that certain conditions support the development of social capital that is supportive of human development.

Woolcock's framework describes three sources of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. Previous social capital theories suggested that there were two forms of social capital - embeddedness and autonomy. Gittel and Vidal (1998) referred to embedded social relations or intra-community ties as bonding social capital and autonomous social ties or extra-community networks as bridging social capital. Woolcock (2001) adopted these two types with a slight amendment. He believed that there were two types of autonomous social ties. Bridging social capital describes horizontal relationships, that is, extra-community relationships with people who share a similar status (Szreter, Woolcock 2004). Linking (or scaling up) social capital describes vertical relationships that are "alliances with sympathetic individuals in positions of power" (Woolcock 2001: 72). The outcomes of social capital according to Woolcock include (but are not limited to) norms, reciprocity, fairness and cooperation (Woolcock 1998). The distinction he draws between sources and benefits is helpful in any attempt to operationalise social capital and derive a list of indicators that can be used to measure social capital's presence and relative strength in a community or a society.

The logical linearity of Woolcock's framework is useful in considering how social capital might complement human capital to support learners in increasing their financial self-sufficiency and generally becoming more self-reliant. The framework can be added to for use in evaluating if NFE creates social capital of the types described by Woolcock (bonding, bridging and linking) which in turn produce outcomes that support the learner in putting their newly acquired human capital to productive use.

3. Research design and methods

Following approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (HE09/161), a pilot study was conducted with four NFE programs provided by one organization in a district in western Uganda. The district's economy is largely dependent on agriculture, in particular the production of sorghum, millet, maize and sweet potatoes. This district is located off the arterial roads that traverse the country. The providing organization is best described as an indigenous organization because it was established by people resident in the district.

The providing organization under investigation had been in operation since 2004. Since that time, it had established its presence in twelve parishes surrounding the district's main town in response to the places of residence of its members. The target group was young adults (18-25 years) and adults (above 25 years) who had minimal or no formal education. The first activity of the providing organization in NFE was to develop skills that were identified as having the potential to generate income for learners. NFE had been offered in book-keeping and recording keeping, organic farming, food-processing, carpentry, tailoring, weaving and nursery education. The second activity was providing learners access to low-interest loans upon completion of their training so that they could establish micro-enterprises.

As part of their participation in NFE, learners were required to become members of the providing organization and participate in their microfinance association. Members of the microfinance association were organized into groups of 10-15 people known as Self Help Groups (SHGs). These groups were firstly organized according to place of residence, and further organized according to either gender or a common skill set. The expectation for these SHGs was that members would meet weekly and make a financial contribution to the group fund. As the balance of the group fund grew, members had the opportunity to draw low-interest loans to be invested in income-generating activities.

Data were gathered in two phases. In the first phase a fourteen-item survey was administered. The first purpose of the survey was to generate demographic data on the learners enrolled in the NFE programs implemented by the providing organization. Seventy-six people from the range of NFE programs offered completed the survey. Survey's respondents were recruited from the membership of the providing organisation. The second purpose of the survey was to develop an understanding of the learner's perspectives on their NFE. In the second phase four learning circles were conducted, one for each of the skill sets being covered in the NFE programs. Distinct from a focus group or a group interview, the learning circle was designed to allow the author and respondents to act as co-analysts of the NFE programs under investigation (Figure 1). One hundred and seventeen people participated in the learning circles. The participants in the learning circles were recruited from and organized according to the program, food processing (14), organic farming (35), carpentry (29) and tailoring (39).

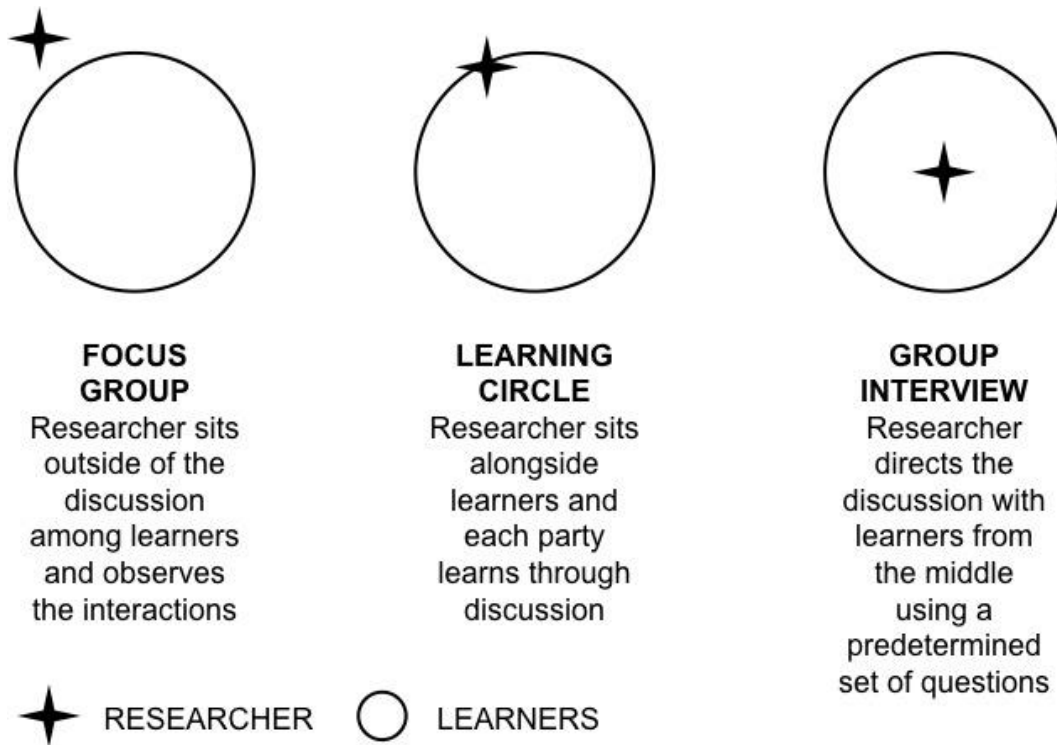


Figure 1. Relationship between researcher and learner in three group data collection methods

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Over the two phases, data were collected from the organization on enrolment patterns, completion rates and post-completion activity. Further, the researcher conducted observation with two purposes in mind. The first was to observe the interactions between learners and facilitators to provide insight into the characteristics of the relationship; while the second was to identify those structural and pedagogical strategies that were used by facilitators in order for the researcher to investigate linkages between these strategies and the development and maintenance or otherwise of bonding, bridging and linking relationships.

4. Findings

The findings of this research indicated that the different sources of social capital (bonding, bridging and linking relationships) were present for learners from each of the four programs. NFE had contributed to the development of these sources via the structural features of

the programs and the instructional modes of delivery. The three relationships were found to produce different consequences that culminated in increased self-reliance for learners.

Bonding relationships

All NFE programs contributed to the creation, maintenance and strengthening of bonding relationships between learners, who found themselves more firmly embedded within their local communities and were more aware of their neighbour's strengths and how they could be utilised to produce community-wide benefits. Participant responses which indicated that these peer relationships were characterised by a high degree of cooperativeness included the following.

“The organisation taught us on how to live in society. It took us to many areas, regions and in that we got friends. It has also taught us on how to earn a living.” (Respondent J)

“We have known each other and now we can help each other.” (Respondent E)

“To learn more skills and knowledge in order to help orphans.” (Respondent I)

“To be able to learn new things and help orphans.” (Respondent P)

These bonding relationships preceded learners' utilisation of the bridging and linking relationships that were created through NFE. But while bonding relationships served to establish a foundation upon which a cooperative income-generating enterprise might be established, without the benefit of linking relationships, such enterprises might fail to be successful. The learners were not skilled at establishing small businesses and were therefore dependent on the expertise of others to help them in locating and securing potential markets and seeking recognition with government agencies that would build their credibility in the eyes of potential customers. This was a concern expressed amongst the learners from the food-processing program. They felt confident in their ability to process and package food to a high standard but were less confident in their ability to market their products and establish a profitable business. The fortnight's training that a member of the food-processing association had been sent on

covered aspects of running a business, but members felt that they all could benefit from further training in this area.

Bridging relationships

Bridging relationships had been created for the food processors through an exchange visit organised by the trainer. The trainer arranged for learners to visit the members of her own food-processing association. The exchange visit provided learners with the opportunity to share experiences with a similar group of people. The exchange visit was particularly helpful to those learners who were part of the food-processing association, as the group they visited had achieved similar goals to the ones they were pursuing, particularly certification with the Uganda Bureau of Standards. There was the potential for information gathering on receiving certification. In the process of experience sharing, learners grew in their confidence to generate income from their food-processing skills.

Linking relationships

Linking relationships were present for learners from all four NFE programs but the success was variable. The learners from the food-processing program, specifically those that had formed the food-processing association, had benefited the most from the linking relationships with their trainer and the providing organization. The learners from the carpentry and tailoring programs had benefited the least from the linking relationship with their trainer and the providing organization. The trainers did not appear to have a significantly larger network of social contacts than the learners themselves, therefore limiting learners' exposure to further opportunities.

Human well-being

The NFE investigated had a positive impact upon a range of indicators of human well-being. The survey responses indicated that learners had gained knowledge and skills through their participation in NFE. Follow-up observational visits to learners' homes confirmed that they were putting these new skills into practice in improving their living conditions and increasing their household income generation. The strength of the bonding relationships created between learners as a result of NFE had contributed to improving the social cohesion of the area in which the programs were provided. Learners were more civically engaged through their contribution to the

microfinance association linked to their NFE programs. The learning circles demonstrated that they were aware of community-wide issues and were willing to advocate for one another where required. Through the application of organic fertilizers and pesticides in the case of learners from the organic farming program, the learners were contributing to an improvement of their natural environment. This was evident in their responses which said:

“I got to know other learners through the training and I’ve kept in touch with them. We used to meet but this time we know each other and try to help each other in farming systems, sharing ideas.” (Respondent A)

*“Through knowing them (other learners) we are able to share items such as pesticides and seeds. Through the training we share knowledge and information on modern ways of farming.”
(Respondent B)*

“Through the training, members who have more land have been able to share some with other members for growing crops which they couldn’t have done on their own land.” (Respondent C)

Finally, learners reported in the learning circle that they had a better understanding of their challenges and a greater degree of self-reliance in overcoming them, attesting to an improvement in their subjective wellbeing. As one participant commented:

“We were poor but now we are self reliant.” (Respondent K)

Income generating prospects

In the period April 2010 to December 2012, the average weekly household income of participants from the four NFE programs increased from US\$4 to US\$8. At the beginning of 2016, weekly household income had doubled again to an average of US\$16; however, the income-generating prospects for graduates of the four programs differed. The prospect for graduates of the food-processing program was the establishment of a food-processing association. This required cooperation between members with income being generated out of cooperation.

This appeared to work well for older participants within this group – those between the age of 36 and 45. This was evident among members who said:

“I have been able to grow more food for my family and sell others.” (Respondent C)

“We have more food at home and more to sell.” (Respondent D)

“I am growing more crops now for my family and I plan to grow more to sell.” (Respondent E)

Furthermore, the providing organisation’s 2011 Annual Report included a report generated by the members of the food-processing association, in which they had described their work in this way:

“The food-processing association was formed in 2009 with an objective of adding value to our agricultural harvests in order to ease marketing and minimize post-harvest wastage. It was formed after a three days of training in food-processing organized by (the providing organisation) after which some focused members who saw it important for our communities to consume organic products that are processed from our locally grown fruits decided to come together and start the group. Since then, we have been processing pineapple juices, fruit jams, tomato sauce, banana wine and cakes. We have a processing room at one of our member’s homes. Our group is registered.” (Community Based Organisation status) both with the Local and District Governments. (Annual Report 2011: 13-14)

In contrast to the expectations of income-generating activities of graduates in the food-processing program, graduates of the organic farming program expected to gain increased agricultural yields that could be sold. There was less need for cooperation between members in this group and income could be generated at the individual level.

There were two opportunities for graduates of the carpentry and tailoring programs. Like the food-processing program, the first opportunity was to establish carpentry and tailoring businesses. Where this has been achieved it had been done between small groups of learners. For example, participants in this group who evidenced this said:

"I have been able to make some money through tailoring in my group." (Respondent D)

"I have got some money for my family to pay school fees." (Respondent Q)

"I have made clothes for my children and my family." (Respondent L)

"I have made bed sheets for my family." (Respondent C)

"I have made a few dresses for family." (Respondent F)

The other prospect was for graduates to be employed by carpenters and tailors who had established businesses. This last prospect required evidence of learners having gained a qualification in carpentry or tailoring. Assessment was a necessary step in the process of receiving the qualification. However, the providing organization hindered the progress of some graduates by being slow in presenting them with their certificates of qualification.

Through their linking relationship with the providing organization, learners have been able to access capital to establish income-generating activities. This capital is offered through the savings and credit cooperative organization that was created by the providing organization. Yet the effectiveness of this relationship was proven to be somewhat variable for the learners participating in this research. Learners were able to draw loans that are repaid at a low interest rate. It was evident that without this access to credit, learners would be unable to apply their skills to income generation. There were inputs associated with each of the program that would need to be purchased to establish an income-generating activity, many of which would be unaffordable to learners if they were not able to access this credit. The results of the learning circles indicated that some learners were frustrated in their attempts to get credit and to get sufficient credit to purchase what they required.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This pilot research provides preliminary indications that NFE can be used to help people become job-makers as opposed to job-doers. This has been mediated by the creation of both human and social capital. Human capital equips learners with skills that are required within a community, while social capital equips learners with the relationships necessary to exploit these skills for income-generation, thus increasing their prospects of greater self-reliance. This is especially important considering the scarce opportunities for the latter group currently in Uganda. As a result of their transition from unemployment to self-employment, learners from the various NFE programs under investigation have experienced positive changes to their holistic wellbeing.

The NFE programs considered here have not been universally successful in supporting learners to achieve self-reliance. For NFE to be promoted as a suitable alternative to formal education across Uganda, further research will need to be conducted into the structural, pedagogical and other features that maximize learner outcomes engaged in this form of education.

NFE has featured on the educational landscape in Uganda for some time and has had an important role to play in raising the educational status of a large number of people who have not had access to formal education. A consideration of the most recent developments in the education sector in Uganda indicates that NFE will continue to be the preserve of the private sector, without the support of the Ugandan Government, for the foreseeable future. In view of this, the implication for NFE is not that it will cease to be provided but that the sector will become further fragmented as private providers operate without government regulation.

This research has indicated the potential for NFE to improve the educational status of learners and impact positively upon their holistic wellbeing. NFE has been presented as a viable option for the minimally schooled or unschooled in Uganda. In consideration of the vital role NFE has been shown to play in the development of human and social capital, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Sports allocate funds in its annual budget for the financing of NFE. Furthermore, the government should assume some responsibility for the oversight, monitoring and regulation of the NFE sector with a view to improving program efficacy. Part of this regulatory framework would need to ensure that NFE programs had structural features and

instructional modes that supported the development of both human and social capital in order for learners to become job-makers as opposed to job-doers.

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Rozwój kapitału ludzkiego i społecznego poprzez zapewnienie nieformalnej edukacji w Zachodniej Ugandzie: badania pilotażowe

Streszczenie:

Od połowy ubiegłego wieku, nieformalna edukacja była promowana jako uzupełnienie lub substytut edukacji formalnej. Doprowadziło to do stworzenia mnóstwa programów, które niejednokrotnie są do siebie zupełnie niepodobne. W niniejszym artykule zawarto argumenty za tym, aby nie traktować NFE ani jako dopełnienia ani substytutu, lecz uznać ją jako alternatywę dla edukacji formalnej. Na podstawie wyników pilotażowych badań nad czterema programami w zachodniej Ugandzie przedstawiono NFE jako realną alternatywę dla edukacji formalnej, dzięki jej zdolności do rozwoju kapitału społecznego, niezbędnego do budowania samodzielności uczących się.

Słowa kluczowe: Uganda, nieformalna edukacja, kapitał społeczny, kapitał ludzki, Bank Światowy
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