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Exploring Formal and Non-formal Education Practices for Integrated and Diverse Learning Environments in Uganda

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Abstract: This paper explores opportunities for integrating formal and non-formal education in Uganda in ways that help learners acquire, build and maintain productive skills for sustainable livelihoods. Using an interpretive paradigm, the authors draw on the capability approach and social practices theory of literacy to guide their qualitative analysis. The authors describe good practices in non-formal education in Uganda and Africa which diversify learning options for learners. Integration of formal and non-formal education is shown as capable of promoting practice-oriented skills learning which can significantly improve Uganda's education system which is currently too theoretical for addressing people's real needs. Such integration can maximize rural people's participation levels in government's poverty reduction interventions and enhance their chances for creating wealth and attaining sustainable livelihoods. Challenges to be faced in bridging the gap between the two forms of education in Uganda are highlighted and the way forward suggested.

Keywords: Education, Formal Education, Indigenous Education, Informal Education, Lifelong Learning, Non-formal Education, Wealth

Introduction

THERE IS NOW a significant renewal of interest in non-formal education globally (Rogers, 2004 in Kamil 2007). This is evident in discussions on formal versus non-formal education and community schools by Hoppers (2005; 2006; 2007; 2008) and the statement that came out from the Council of Europe. It maintains that:

....formal educational systems alone cannot respond to the challenges of modern society and therefore welcomes its reinforcement by non-formal educational practices. The Assembly recommends that governments and appropriate authorities of member states recognize non-formal education as a de facto partner in the lifelong process and make it accessible for all (Council of Europe, 2000, in Kamil, 2007, p. 2).

Also with the increasing diversity within what we call formal education, it is no longer clear what to include and exclude under formal education (Rogers, 2004). Hence, this paper explores opportunities for integrating formal and non-formal education in Uganda to help people acquire, build and enhance productive skills they need for creating wealth, establishing a sustainable livelihood, and enjoying a better quality of life. The study was guided by the following key questions: What are the major differences between formal and non-formal

education? What would be the value of integrating formal and non-formal education? What are the historical, cultural, socio-economic and political contexts in which education is provided in Uganda? What opportunities and constraints exist in Uganda, at local and national levels for linking formal and non-formal education? How can the challenges be effectively addressed? Although not the main focus of this paper, the concept of informal education shall also be briefly discussed in this paper for purposes of clarity.

We present the similarities and differences between formal and non-formal education and describe the socio-economic, historical and political contexts in which the two forms of education are provided in Uganda. To broaden the understanding of the issue at hand, we analyze some examples of selected non-formal educational interventions in Uganda and other African countries to derive some lessons. Based on this analysis, we provide the rationale and outline a strategy for integrating them to widen access to education. Examples of good practices in non-formal adult literacy programmes intended to promote socio-economic transformation in Uganda are discussed. Challenges to this effort are highlighted and the way forward is suggested. In the following section, we describe the concept of education as used in the paper and the present the differences between the two forms of education under consideration.

What is Education?

Education has been defined differently by different people. We draw inspiration from various sources to conceptualize education as the process of imparting and acquiring knowledge, skills and attitude through various forms of teaching and learning with a view to preparing individuals to be responsible citizens (Jackson, n.d.). It is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills, and values from one generation to another. It is “an important asset that raises people’s aspirations to increased social, economic, and cultural performance; raises their level of awareness of their environment and equips them with the necessary skills and ideology for contending with the problems they encounter in their daily lives” (Ishumi, 1976, p. 6).

There are different types of education ranging from formal to non-formal and informal education depending on the context, methods, curriculum and teaching and learning materials used. In the following section, formal and non-formal forms of education are briefly explained.

Distinction between Formal and Non-formal Education

Firstly, in our paper, we use the term ‘formal education’ to refer to that type of education which is structured, in some cases state supported, certified and follows a pre-determined/written curriculum. Drawing from Coombs, Prosser, and Ahmed (1973), Baguma and Okecho (2010, p. 2) further describe formal education as: “the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded educational system running from primary school through to University and including, in addition to general academic studies, a variety of specialized programs and institutions for full-time technical and professional training”.

Secondly, non-formal education refers to that type of education which takes place outside of the formally organized school such as adult literacy and continuing education programmes for adults and out of school youth which do not necessarily emphasize certification. UNESCO (1997a, p. 14; 1997b) describes non-formal education as “any organized and sustained edu-

ational activities that do not exactly correspond to the definition of formal education.” In other words, non-formal education may refer to any educational activity organized by different agencies for a particular target group in a given population, especially adults outside the framework of formal education to provide selected types of skills.

Slightly different from non-formal education is the concept of informal education. To obtain a better understanding of formal and non-formal education, it’s important to discuss the concept of informal learning. This refers to a largely unconscious process through which people acquire and accumulate experience, knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily life experiences and exposure to the environment. Kleis, Lang, Mietus, and Tiapula, (1973, pp. 3–4, cited in Etlling, 1993, 73) observed that informal education deals with every-day experiences which are not planned or organized but are incidental learning. Such learning can occur from family and neighbours, from work and play, from the market place, the library and the mass media (Coombs, Prosser & Ahmed, 1973). Although we are only focusing on two, we do recognize that there are three different ways by which people can learn, that is, through formal and non-formal education, and informal learning.

Further distinction between formal and non-formal education can be seen in Simkins (1977, pp. 12–15, cited in Fordham, 1993) and as summarized in Table 1 below. The differences can be seen in terms of the purpose, timing, content, delivery system and level of control.

Table 1: Ideal Type/Models of Formal and Non-formal Education

Differences	Formal Education	Non-formal Education
Purpose	- Long-term and general - Certified	- Short-term and specific - Certificate not necessarily the main purpose
Timing	- Long cycle/preparatory/full-time	- Short cycle/recurrent/part-time
Content	- Standardized/input centered - Academic - Entry requirements determine clientele	- Individualized/output centered - Practical - Clientele determine the entry requirements
Delivery system	-Institution-based, isolated from environment -Rigidly structured, teacher-centered and resource intensive	-Environment-based and embedded in the community -Flexible, learner-centered and resource efficient
Control	External/hierarchical	-Self-governing/democratic
Source: Adapted from Simkins (1977, pp. 12–15, cited in Fordham, 1993)		

The Contextual and Theoretical Framework

In this section, we present a descriptive account of the socio-economic, historical, and political contexts in which formal and non-formal education are provided in Uganda. We also describe the theoretical framework based on the social practices theory of literacy and the capability approach to literacy to inform arguments advanced in the paper.

Context of Formal and Non-formal Education Provision in Uganda

Uganda has taken considerable strides in the provision of both formal and non-formal education (Ngaka, 2005). The formal education system in Uganda falls under the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and it encompasses primary, secondary and tertiary education. The foundation for both types of education was laid by the Islamic and Christian Missionaries and later built upon by colonial and post-colonial administrations.

In an effort to contribute towards meeting some of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Uganda adopted Universal Primary Education (UPE) which greatly boosted formal primary education, followed by a surge in the numbers of school going age children enrolled in its primary schools (Ndeezi, 2000; Etonu, 2003). The successful implementation of the UPE was followed by the introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007 (UNDP, 2007a; 2007b) which has also seen very many children accessing secondary education.

The implementation of both UPE and USE programmes in Uganda were preceded by the implementation of non-formal educational intervention called the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) Programme in 1992 under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD) which takes responsibility for provision and overseeing activities of adult literacy education programmes in the country. FAL has since been rolled out to most districts in Uganda. The efforts of MoGLSD in adult literacy education provision are complemented by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

However, despite such significant efforts by government, CSOs, FBOs and CBOs, the provision of formal and non-formal educational programmes have taken a parallel trend with minimal integration and no systematic mechanism to equate and document learning that occurs outside the formal school system, hence making people despise non-formal education. The 1999 evaluation report of the FAL programme indicates that many FAL participants drop out and complain of lack of accreditation and recognition of the learning they get through their participation in FAL programmes, thus denying them access to life improving opportunities and continuing education.

In the next section, the purpose of this paper is to share some of the good practices in adult literacy education programmes that are put in place in Africa to enhance the living condition of the poor. The Government of Uganda also considers FAL as a tool for poverty eradication. Some of the examples of literacy programmes are presented here to identify lessons to emulate to facilitate the attainment of the goal of wealth creation and sustainable development in Uganda.

Review of Selected Cases of Related Non-formal Education Programmes in Africa

To broaden the discussion and obtain a better understanding of formal and non-formal educational provision in Uganda, we undertook a literature review of similar programmes in other African countries. This literature search on success stories on non-formal education programmes in some selected African countries reveals many cases. For instance, Ngaka (2010), Maddox (2008), Hoppers (2005; 2006; 2007; 2008) and Thompson (2001) provide useful information on formal and non-formal education and livelihoods of the people. In

fact, Thompson (2001) summarizes five interesting cases that can inform the integration of formal and non-formal education in Uganda. These include: (1) the Undugu Basic Education Programme (UBEP) in Kenya which offers opportunities to acquire functional literacy and practical skills to street children, and other disadvantaged children in the slums of Nairobi with considerable success, (2) the Basic Education in Urban Poverty Areas (BEUPA) in Kampala, Uganda, whose principal aim was to improve the life perspectives of out-of-school children and adolescents between the ages of 9–18 from selected suburbs of Kampala, (3) the Alternative Approaches Through Community Schools (AATCS) in Zambia where serious efforts were made to provide literacy, leadership and vocational training and health education for youths and adults in order to improve their living standards, (4) the Better Environmental Science Training (BEST) in Zimbabwe where efforts were made to focus on environmental and agricultural training to prepare learners to actively engage in agricultural production as a livelihood strategy; and (5) the Political Literacy and Civic Education Programme (POL-CEP) of Kroo Bay Urban Slum, Freetown in Sierra Leone, which was designed to address issues of large-scale mismanagement of the economy, high levels of official corruption, violation of people's rights and general inefficiency and apathy accompanied by a pervasive culture of impunity in the societies.

Although in-depth studies on the above mentioned cases are relatively scarce, the little that is known about them as presented in Thomson (2001) suggests that provision of non-formal education targets specific sectors of the population, pursues a clearly defined purpose, and can help to address multiple problems facing the different communities. What this means is that in an effort to address some specific community problems, especially through an educational intervention, certain opportunities are created in which formal and non-formal education can be integrated and attempts could be made to document and equate such learning with the one that takes place in a formal setting. Our observations suggest that opportunities such as those described in our findings section are many in Uganda and could be used to help people learn with confidence through multiple channels. In the following section, we briefly describe the conceptual and theoretical framework that informs our paper.

Theoretical Framework of the Paper

This paper was informed by the two theoretical perspectives, namely the social practices theory of literacy and Sen's capability theory described below.

Social Practices Theory of Literacy

This paper uses the social practices approach to literacy and numeracy to support our arguments regarding the importance, accreditation, equation, recognition and integration of learning that occurs in different contexts of literacy use in everyday life. The social practices approach to literacy also known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS), conceptualizes literacy as social practices of people embedded in politics and associated with power relations in specific socio-cultural contexts, meanings and practices (Street, 1984; Baynham 1995; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996; Baynham & Prinsloo, 2001; Prinsloo 2005). NLS proponents view literacy practices as linking people of different languages, media objects and strategies for meaning making in context-specific circumstances (Prinsloo, 2005). The approach emphasizes that people need to start learning literacy based on what they know, do, practice and experi-

ence or encounter in their everyday lives and then move on to encompass broader social, cultural and development issues (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996). The focus of this approach is on the immediate application of the acquired/learnt skills which is more common in non-formal education settings than a formal setting where emphasis is on knowledge or knowing. The approach advocates for not just a single autonomous school model of literacy which is spelt with a capital 'L' and uniform technical skills, but multiple literacies, in which meanings and uses are drawn from the specific socio-cultural contexts in which people interact with their everyday lives (Barton 1994). This paper calls for a deliberate attempt to equate and integrate learning from diverse sources and not just concentrating on and glorifying knowledge and learning from formal educational settings only.

Sen's Capability Theory

The capability approach supports, "Literacy and basic education as an important social entitlement, a key determinant of well-being and a goal of human development" (Maddox, 2008, p. 185). According to Sen (1999), an individual's capability refers to a combination of different things (tasks and aspirations) that he or she can achieve. It is a representation of what a person is able to *do* and *be*, including "the ability to be well nourished, to avoid escapable morbidity or mortality, to read, write and communicate, to take part in the life of the community, and to appear in public without shame" (Sen, 1999, p. 126).

The capability approach identifies literacy as a crucial means to human capability enhancement, because it recognizes illiteracy as "a significant avoidable form of human deprivation" (Maddox, 2008, p. 187). It underscores the role of literacy in social interactions between people in which emphasis is laid on application, uses of literacy skills and not accumulating the skills to do nothing. To Sen, literacy helps people in their social relations to do what they want to do in their networks and be who they want to be in the society. The emphasis placed on practice and application of learnt skills in the two theories can be experienced more widely in a non-formal than a formal educational setting. It is against this background that this paper argues for an integrated system of education which equates and recognizes the different ways in which people learn. This will enable people to learn in any way convenient to them and still acquire the necessary skills for effectively engaging in appropriate livelihood activities and attainment of sustainable livelihoods and certifications which facilitates the portability of their skills and knowledge regardless of how it has been acquired.

Methods

This was a qualitative research design in which both primary and secondary data were collected using multiple methods in four regions of Uganda (Eastern, Northern, Central and Western). We wanted to study the provision of formal and non-formal education in their natural setting to help develop insights regarding how the two can be meaningfully integrated in ways that contribute to sustainable livelihoods. We wanted to understand the different meanings and values that the people of Uganda assign to the two forms of education. Our choice of tools for data collection required the respondents to provide us with their personal experience and understanding of the formal and non-formal educational provision in their region (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

In line with our qualitative research approach and interpretive paradigm, we used a purposive sampling method to select people who we believed were in the position to provide the most information about formal and non-formal education. This included District Education officers and Community Development officers. We used theoretical sampling to collect documented information. This, according to Bryman (2001), is a sampling procedure in which data is initially collected coded, analysed and from the analysis determine the next round of data collection through literature review of documents on formal and non-formal educational provision in Uganda.

We used semi-structured interviews and documentary study guides focusing on the implementation of formal and non-formal education in Uganda. Accordingly, a comprehensive document review and analysis of various materials related to poverty reduction and education was done, particularly non-formal education. This analysis generated useful information which we used to understand the relationship between formal and non-formal education provision and how the two can contribute to sustainable livelihoods. The document analysis were complemented by semi-structured interviews with four small scale farmers, one from each region of Uganda, who were active in the government's poverty reduction interventions programmes such as the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) programme, National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), Plan for Modernization of Agriculture (PMA), Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) and many others. In addition to the interviews, semi-annual visits were made to the villages of the four interviewees during 2008–2009 to understand the administration and management of different program interventions. To reinforce some of the observations, telephone interviews were conducted with Community Development Officers (CDOs) in the districts where the four participants reside to follow up certain issues emerging from the selected participants interviewed individually. The regular visits were made possible because the first two authors were both affiliated to Makerere University Department of Community Education and Extra-Mural Studies (CEEMS) in which there were regular community outreach programmes and the third author was engaged in developing a multifaceted rural livelihoods project in Uganda. The rural visits offered a rare opportunity for the authors to see what people were doing and how the results of the observations would fit in the responses from the participants and secondary data from various sources. It should be noted that being qualitative in nature, the main aim of the study was not to generate findings that would be generalized to the entire population in Uganda. Rather, it was intend to be a detailed description of people's perceptions on how formal and non-formal education could be integrated.

Key Findings of the Study

Our documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, telephone calls to the CDOs and observations of what actually takes place in the various poverty reduction interventions through non-formal community education revealed a number of interesting themes on the role of non-formal education in fostering participation in local development activities. It also generated insights regarding opportunities for integrating the two forms of education, challenges associated with such an attempt, and suggestions to address the challenges. The key issues that emerged from the data are analyzed and discussed below.

The Importance of Integrating Formal and Non-formal Education

A number of arguments have been advanced for linking formal and non-formal education (Baguma and Okecho, 2010). Our observations about different activities in poverty reduction interventions regarding the need for integration of the two forms of education are consistent with the views of Thompson (2001) who suggested that non-formal education should be linked to the formal education because of its ability to help: (1) address the contradictions and distortions in macro-economic situations, (2) bring about equity in participation in development programmes thereby helping to reduce the severe disparities in standards of living between the 'haves' and 'have nots,' (3) address the challenges brought about by internal armed conflicts and internal displacement of persons, (4) quickly reach different communities with strategies for mitigating the undesirable consequences of the on-going HIV/AIDS pandemic, (5) educate communities on the impending environmental impacts of climate change, (6) meet the diverse educational needs of multi-cultural and post-modern societies (du Boi-Reymond, 2003), (7) ensure cost-effective educational service delivery, (8) assist in poverty reduction efforts, and (9) enable the beneficiaries to receive holistic training (Tavola, 2000). Some opportunities in Uganda from which the stated benefits of non-formal education could be exploited are described in the following section.

Available Opportunities for Integrating Formal and Non-formal Education in Uganda

Opportunities for integrating formal and non-formal education are not ubiquitous, but the result of deliberate efforts to respond to communities' identified and expressed needs. Such interventions can help create a conducive environment for integrating formal and non-formal education, as well as maximizing the benefits that communities would enjoy from such functional integration. The Uganda government and other educational service providers could take advantage of major interventions like NAADS, PMA described earlier (Ngaka, 2010), emerging Savings and Credit Co-operative Societies (SACCOS), the proliferation of FM radio stations in almost all districts, electoral processes that are characterized by voter apathy, commercialization of votes, and election violence; national and regional agricultural trade shows; and the mushrooming community polytechnics/colleges. Such opportunities could be seized to influence the curriculum and how it is delivered (pedagogy), and enhance learning in both formal and non-formal environments.

In terms of whether there are different groups and agencies involved in adult and non-formal education that can make use of the programmes/interventions mentioned above, to integrate formal, and non-formal education, we noted that there were many organizations that could make use of the above programmes to enhance learning in the community.

Our analysis reveals several opportunities that different organizations could use. For example, the various interventions that have been going on in different parts of Uganda entail practical issues, not merely theoretical knowledge as is often the case in formal school education. We believe that if learning in formal and non-formal environment could be embedded in such practice based contexts where the acquired skills are immediately applied in real life situations, it would improve the measurable learning outcomes from education.

Available opportunities, some of which were mentioned earlier include: the FAL Programme which is supposed to be integrative and directly help communities address the mul-

multiple challenges facing them in their effort to survive in the global market and knowledge based economy, the intervention of Uganda Program of Literacy for Transformation (UPLIFT) based in Nebbi District, West Nile Region, which helps participants acquire the skills, knowledge, and incentive for a “lifelong self-improvement plan,” Adult Literacy and Basic Education Centre (ALBEC)’s flexible, non-formal and semi-formal literacy and adult basic education, which has helped many people who have initially missed out on the opportunity to participate in the cherished formal education to return to this cherished mainstream formal education; and the Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) which was implemented in Karamoja, Northern Region, to offer excellent educational/learning opportunities for the Karamojongs, the majority of whom had missed the chance of being in the preferred formal education. According to Licht (n.d.) and Sekandi (2009), ABEK involved ten learning areas namely livestock education, crop production, peace and security, human health and other relevant subjects integrated with basic reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Other programmes include the Uganda Rural Literacy and Community Development Association (URLCODA)’s Integrated Intergenerational Literacy Project in West Nile (URLCODA, 2008; Ngaka, 2004) which brings together both children and adults to learn literacy and life skills in an integrated manner under the same learning environment, the Complementary Opportunities for Primary Education (COPE) project operated in several districts and which provides a flexible alternatives for acquiring basic education (Deweese, 2010); and the BEUPA programme in Kampala, Central region which has as its goal the mainstreaming of poor children in Kampala’s suburbs into vocational and technical education (Healingnumenor, 2009). From the above listed programmes, there are multiple opportunities for integrating formal and non-formal education.

Challenges in Integrating Formal, and Non-formal in Uganda

The current and anticipated challenges in efforts to recognize and integrate formal and non-formal education are many and varied. Lack of funds to meet the increasing demand for formal and non-formal education, minimal commitment by government in terms of policy and resources to support non-formal education, lack of a national qualifications framework and minimal attention to systematic training and building the capacity of non-formal education instructors are some of the key challenges that will hamper efforts to integrate formal and non-formal education in Uganda.

Conclusion

Availability of and access to education is a fundamental human right. Recognizing and integrating the various forms of education is an essential strategic intervention necessary for achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA) in accordance with the principles of the World Declaration on EFA and Dakar Framework for Action for which partnerships are crucial.

Although literacy is not a panacea for solving all the problems facing communities globally, there is now no doubt that a literate population is more productive and empowered to make informed decisions to enjoy sustainable livelihoods than an illiterate population. It should be pointed out that non-formal education should not be assumed to be for non-literates only because it does accommodate literate people and contribute towards improving their liveli-

hoods. Hence, the low status that people accord to non-formal education and minimal support to promote it by governmental and other actors constitute a great barrier for the majority of those who, if adequately prepared through non-formal education, would be able to meaningfully engage in different livelihood support activities initiated by government and civil society organizations (CSOs).

“As the need for integrating formal and non-formal education is highlighted by Rogers (2004), Hoppers (2005; 2006; 2007; 2008) and Thompson (2001), educational programme planners, designers and implementers urgently need to remove the distinctions between ‘formal’ and ‘non-formal’ so that the two can be seen as an integral part of the education system complementing one another”. There should be an environment which allows learners to freely move from one form of education to the other without being stigmatized. Deliberate policies to enable learners gain access to various educational or learning options should be initiated, designed and implemented.

Efforts should be directed towards increasing learner involvement in curriculum design and other stages of learning. This is because learners in non-formal environments come with real life experiences to share with others. Quite often, their input in the planning, design and implementation of the curriculum from which they would benefit is ignored. In some cases, this can cause high dropout rates among the learners as their needs and perspectives are not taken into consideration. This is disheartening since learning should now be a lifelong process and not something assumed to be attained only through formal means. Examples such as the one at ALBEC where flexible educational programmes take into consideration the needs of the learners and use professionally trained rather than volunteer instructors could offer some lessons for other agencies.

If we are to embrace the totality of all forms of education under what Rogers (2004) refers to as the ‘rubric of lifelong education’, the discourse of lifelong learning needs to speak of all forms of education-‘formal,’ ‘non-formal,’ and even ‘informal’ learning. This is important because lifelong learning/education helps to advance the promotion of economic growth and enhancement of active citizenship among the people.

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