



# Leveraging Business, Commerce, and Education to Enhance Quality of Life, Tourism, and Academic Performance in Western Uganda: A Comprehensive Study.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between business, commerce, education, and their impact on the quality of life, tourism, and academic performance in Western Uganda. It explores how initiatives in these sectors contribute to economic growth, social development, and educational outcomes. Using a mixed-methods approach, data is collected from various sources including literature review, field studies, and stakeholder interviews. The study evaluates the effectiveness of existing programs and proposes strategies for enhancing synergies between these sectors to maximize their collective benefits. The findings shed light on the potential for fostering sustainable development and improving livelihoods in the region.

**Keywords:** Western Uganda, quality of life, tourism, academic performance and business

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## INTRODUCTION

When it's good, even tourist attractions improve, GDP grows, and people earn more. However, when it's poor, fewer people earn, tourism takes a knock, and as a result, GDP fails to grow and social problems arise. Is Uganda's education system improving the quality of life? The question is important because Universal Primary Education (UPE) has become a policy to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Indeed, critical to the achievement of this policy is the assessment of its sustainability and its impact in driving social sustainable economic growth [1-3]. The literature that abounds on this topic is limited to the discussion on the increase in enrollment, dropouts, completion rates, and quantitative indicators. It has, however, given limited attention to the qualitative evidence as measured by the indicators elaborated in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) definition of HDI. The paper uses Western Uganda as a case study and presents an aspect of balance characterized by the existence of complementarities and the structuration approach theory in the context of the qualitative evaluation of the introduction of trading as an A-level subject to the education curriculum in Uganda [4, 5]. In Uganda's vision for 2040, the development of the population is pegged to a family's ability to meet the cost related to access to utilities (water, power, education, housing, medical care, and transportation). This view was adopted at the 2007 Education Joint Sector Review and 2007 and 2008 Teachers' Annual National Conference as a corporate dialogue for the sector conducted under the theme "Accountability for Quality Education Provision" [6, 7]. In the 21st century, developing countries like Uganda are still far behind the developed world in socio-economic development. The underdevelopment is attributed to factors like high population growth, poor government policy and implementation, gender inequality, poor education quality, health, and high trading tariffs with the rest of the world among others. Quality of life is usually measured using the Human Development Index (HDI), which is a composite index defined as a weighted average of the indicators of real GDP per capita, educational attainment, and life expectancy [8, 9].

### Business and Commerce in Western Uganda

The business environment in Uganda is influenced by the elite, poor governance, different groups of investors, low human capital development, and high levels of poverty. Tourism is no different in the two districts and is a major subject of local newspapers [10, 11]. Among other factors, traditionalism, global effects, and government policies play a major role in shaping the tourism industry. Various laws have

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provided for the establishment of the Uganda Tourism Board, which is responsible for formulating policies and regulations to govern the tourism sector. Just like business, tourism in Kabale and Mbarara is not immune to climatic variation. The purpose of our study, therefore, was to investigate the factors that influence business, commerce, and education in the two districts and evaluate the relationship between business, commerce, education, tourism, quality of good life, and academic performance [12, 13]. Uganda is the Pearl of Africa and Western Uganda is a major tourist destination in Uganda that holds diverse ethnicities. The region is characterized by agriculture and among its districts, Kabale is particularly a dominant one. The first inhabitants of the area were hunters who settled in the volcanic southwestern region of Uganda with several ethnicities, Kiga and Bakiga being the major ones. The region is made up of volcanic soils which were later left with pozzolanas. Environmental changes in the early (around the 1880s) and the 21st century in the region have played a major role in shaping business in Kabale. Towards the 21st century, drought, flooding, and land clearing by landlords enticed people to grow Irish potatoes along the slopes of the region. This diminished their growth and by the year 2001, rice growing became a dominant farming activity [14, 15].

#### **Economic Impact**

The conservation initiative maintains the UNESCO Heritage Site, compensates villagers for lost crops, and provides employment with Park admission revenue shared with local governments. The provision of financial capital and technical expertise provided on loans to local businesses, supporting trained and untrained entrepreneurs, and permitting expansion in the agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial sectors all provide up and downstream employment. While seemingly unrelated, the initiatives' contributions to business, income, and commerce yield immediate results and contribute significantly to the overall feelings of well-being among people in the area [16, 17].

Each of the four interventions described has a clear economic impact and provides an instant return on investment. The English Immersion Program provides salaries for teachers and administrators, as well as income for local farmers who raise animals and vegetables for the School Feeding Program. Equally important is the formal educational opportunity that previously did not exist for the children residing in the southwestern sector of the Queen Elizabeth National Park and surrounding areas. Once up and running, it is expected that the School Garden Program will yield approximately three times the seller cost of a tree, plus the multi-crop yield from the land under each tree. As a start, with 1,000 peach, 500 passion, and 100 lemon trees providing a multi-crop yield, plus seeds/plants for multiple macadamia trees, the School Garden Program will provide micro-finance resources for expansion, as well as ongoing maintenance for the Millennium village [18, 19].

#### **Entrepreneurship Opportunities**

In Uganda, the environment is observed as having a greater opportunity for youth to come up with successful innovations and business opportunities. This position, however, depends on management skills that enhance quality innovative outcomes. In western Uganda, inventions like hand tractors and low-cost irrigation kits that have had transformational impacts in the agriculture sector have had limited commercial success. This is partly due to a lack of business management skills by local innovators. Entrepreneurial minds, however, collectively decide and eventually determine the economic development of societies. Universities instruct future businessmen and innovators in academia. Tertiary institutes also act as a bridge uniting the academic threshold and the socioeconomic platform. This transition provides an opportunity to link innovation outcomes from the instructive side to the commercial enterprise side. This is true in the Ugandan setting where most of the sensible innovations have not entered the market due partly to a lack of business management skills of the inventors [20]. The government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Labour, Gender, and Social Development, documented that students need to develop their business and entrepreneurship skills in the education sector. This is intended to result in viable employment and self-employment opportunities in the economy. Education provides students with the knowledge and mindsets that can create skilled human capital involved in economically viable activities. Furthermore, education and science/technology capabilities have a significant bearing on economic development. Consequently, education enables people to become more productive and effective users of the resources that their society and environment make available to them. Indeed, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, countries that have achieved economic development have done so largely due to the education of their population. While other valid reasons are likely to be identified, the engineering behind the development of Birmingham, England owes its origin to education. Based on the positive correlations between education and economic development, the government of Uganda has sought to solve the issues of unemployment and improve economic development by integrating entrepreneurship education in schools [21].

### **Education in Western Uganda**

Although 23.5% of children live their primary education without formal schooling and at a minimum of 68.6% of pupils do not complete past their primary education, according to recent reports, the country, and more specifically western Uganda is in a period of transition that will affect the nation going forward. Therefore, even though the basis of formal education is knowledge, these figures underscore the role society finds itself now; on a bridge between two continents – one that is familiar and another hurting as it rushes towards them. There exists the possibility, on this bridge, for the growth and development of another, crisscrossing the old and the new – a world of unique discovery, celebrating the past even as it anticipates the future. In reality, the creation of knowledge has significant ramifications for the need to balance the need for continuous learning with that of structured learning through formal education [22, 23]. In western Uganda, four main types of education occur, including formal, non-formal, informal, and open and distance education. The formal education operations are characterized by mode, place, distance, and assessment and certification. Education in all parts of Uganda comes in several forms, with each playing a significant role in society and, by extension, the economy. The education system in Uganda is composed of 7 years of primary education, with students graduating with a basic certificate from primary. After four years of secondary education, students sit for the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) examinations before proceeding to another level of secondary that is divided into A-level (Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education), and university or vocational education and training (VET). A more recent study showed an increase from less than \$1000 in annual income to over \$3000 following various levels of education [24, 25].

### **Access to Education**

The capacity of the teachers, the quality of education, and assessment in some schools is poor. In rural areas, schools underperform, and weak policies to support and enhance the timely construction of new school facilities, sensitivity to civilization, equal opportunities, etc. Less attention is given to ECD yet services are below demand. In terms of curriculum content, scope, relevance, and student assessments, schools have inadequate moderation. This makes it difficult to establish national and international benchmarks for quality assurance in terms of academic performance [26]. Poor academic performance, high rate of school dropouts, shortage of skilled labor, disconnection of education from the local community needs, and lack of career guidance make the education system ineffective. Commercialization of natural resources and the liberalization of schools are likely to further deepen the gap, raising barriers to UBE [27]. This is one of the significant things that the discussion will be involved in achieving. This is because education is key to success and growth in every society. There is a wide education gap in western Uganda where over 300,000 children are out of school. The long distances to school, poverty, and traditional beliefs are major contributing factors that exacerbate the problem among girls, boys with disabilities, pregnant girls, married or those at risk of becoming child laborers among others. There is, therefore, no way the region can sustainably create real business and career opportunities with such a state of affairs [28].

### **Quality of Education**

Signs of quality in education include the extent to which it flows from recent or original research and contributes to extending the frontiers of knowledge for practical purposes, the practical relevance of the knowledge, the continuing success of its graduates at higher levels of learning largely outside the country, the research that addresses the need of people living close to the institution, the teamwork and entrepreneurship initiatives some graduates have pursued, and the support from local industry in the student learning experiences. Both the content and methods of teaching are considered. A research university such as British Columbia University in Vancouver employs, in the main, research doctors and professors with experience in the field, for postgraduate studies to provide up-to-date, applicable information. A purely academic approach to problems that does not take the reality of life into account educates graduates who have difficulties providing practical solutions to practical problems [29, 30]. To keep a well-rounded perspective, the levels of education must be considered relative to the quality of education. While we must ensure that access to education is guaranteed, we must also ensure that the quality of education is such that it enables the population to take advantage of that education. It is neither practical nor advisable to consider one type of education, as well as one level of that education, to the exclusion of all others. There must be opportunities for all forms of education for all people, to enable everyone to achieve the best possible quality of education, given one's ability. Quality at the tertiary level may be defined as providing the knowledge and skills demanded by stakeholders toward solutions for a better quality of life [31].

### **Vocational Training**

Most vocational training programs are not able to take full advantage of the Africans' growing access to the internet as a means for learning, as the technology infrastructure does not exist. To address this 21st-century learning skill, participants have developed a technology infrastructure as a means of providing students with options to obtain course material, submit assignments, and create a digital portfolio. They have developed online support for users of Linux, typically requiring minimal system maintenance, making them an ideal match for Africa's sporadic and often inadequate power supply. The ability to download and share large files has been especially difficult in Uganda. Users are able to mirror these Ubuntu repositories known collectively as Ubuntu Uganda Remixed. After building new bandwidth infrastructure for their maker space, participants also mirror training materials for the non-profit "I am the Future of Uganda." This non-profit operates a girls' school for around 700 students and a vocational training center. Mirrored technical materials have reduced the distribution time from 2 months by courier to an estimated one hour [32, 33]. There is a great disconnect between training programs and available jobs. Participants have, therefore, built partnerships with local and national employment service providers to help graduates obtain jobs. As part of this, they also engage businesses in training design so that skills taught are more aligned with market demand. The participants have taught 41 dairy farming classes between 2010 and 2012, reaching such far-flung Ugandan locations as Kaseese, Luuka, Rakai, Kumi, Buleia, and Muloko. The goal is mission: to increase milk production, business skills, informed decision-making, and community well-being. The program has seen 186 graduates with an estimated 4:1 ratio of new jobs to trainees. Nearly all graduates have participated in the makers' community of practice sessions before and after the classes. The multi-stage program evaluation plans to assess graduates' ability to find, secure, and retain jobs, as well as leverage locally available funding. The program is producing significantly more successful graduates than traditional vocational training programs [35-37].

### **Enhancing Quality of Life, Tourism, and Academic Performance**

Even before defining tourism, it is important to clarify that tourism is traditionally billed as driving quality of life, but on closer deduction, core attributes/manufacturing/crafting for academic performance/research, in the differentiation, authenticity, identity, and quality focus, what are theoretically incomplete definitions [38, 39]. Many policy documents, business reports, and voluminous academic papers containing multifaceted accounts of quality of life for the individual and community have discussed wealth generation, reality and freedom, harmony and fairness, security, knowledge, health, and environment. However, only the first four aspects are controllable by an individual. This provides a rationale for the promotion of an individual, the individual's family, and the neighborhood as innovation systems or locally provided, however global, entrepreneurship ecosystems. Based on this innovation system paradigm, therefore, the paper argues that business, commerce, and education-based ecosystems are employed to drive collective quality of life, especially through tourism and academic performance. This argument is referred to as academic performance [40 – 42]. This paper attempts to answer the question of why business, commerce, research, and development are not part of the discourse on quality of life, tourism, and academic performance, and what could be achieved should business, commerce, and education-based ecosystems be deliberately promoted to drive quality of life, tourism, and academic performance. By exploring published resources and reflecting on regional, national, and international experiences, as well as our research in one sub-region of Uganda, the paper argues for more extensive research and development on business, commerce, and education-based ecosystems aiming to serve as enablers of both individual and community quality of life, mostly through tourism and academic performance [43, 44]. The burgeoning concept of a 'service ecosystem' has been a dominant discourse in management and business research for some time now. The service ecosystem concept is a derivative of the resource-based view of the firm as it stipulates that resource integration within and outside the firm should be emphasized. Since then, multiple aspects of the ecosystem concept, including entrepreneurial ecosystems and learned or knowledge hub ecosystems, have been studied and experimented with all over the world. Developing economies, including many African economies, are experiencing rapid economic growth and the service sector has typically been the dominant driver of this growth [45].

### **Infrastructure Development**

The Ugandan government, let's hope on other governments too, does not provide titles, employ people, nor, worse still, initiate physical activities unless they have been asked to do so in some form. Parliament, the second person the most powerful in this universal human reality, cannot do so as far as a hierarchy of needs; i.e., electricity, water, food, and road vehicles, is not demonstrated. It is, therefore, the supreme duty of Ugandan scholars—of Western Uganda sampled here being part—to stir all the other powers to regulate their attention differently from the status quo; i.e., do away with all the verbal and written strategies, redefine the national budget to include real needs of infrastructure, and ensure that all

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infrastructure projects are implemented in time [46]. It doesn't take one to go through tiring prior literature or extensive field research in Western Uganda to conclude that the area is bedeviled by just one and yet multi-sectoral challenge: infrastructure. Operatives in tourism, professional business, agriculture, and education, both experienced and the hippies, are spinning on the same good question: electricity, good roads, hotel accommodation, reliable sources of water, etc. After reflecting on these aspects for just three minutes, you will certainly conclude that there are no two ways around it: if the necessary efforts are not re-adjusted to give requirements for infrastructure priority, this chapter will not be able to be utilized by scholars or entrepreneurs [47].

### **Sustainable Tourism Practices**

Tourism favors the communities whose lands contain the most attractive wildlife. Indeed, the economies close in proximity to national reserves and neighboring countries to Uganda benefit greatly from the coordinates, public services, and facilities found within. However, it has been argued that animal populations should not be exploited for meat for the benefit of locals. This is because wildlife tourism initiatives create targets that benefit only a few citizens but prevent the majority of those in proximity from consuming delicate, slow-reproducing populations. Similarly, one may reason that commercial operations within NPs aim to raise revenues for the country while providing economic stimuli within the local administrative areas. However, it has also been noted that these operations disadvantage community exposure to the benefits of revenue collection [48, 49]. Over the last three years, the Uganda Tourism Board actively promoted sustainable tourism by working with various Printerful Strategies and supported projects. One such project was the Uganda Museum, in which three visiting U.S. scholars and seven local students worked on projects targeting the improvement of collection management and exhibitions for archaeology and cultural technologies in G'Karabundo, Uganda. This project was strategically related to the 1993 McGraw-Hill conference, at which several recommendations involving sustainable curriculum development projects were proposed. It was also related to the impact of protected areas charging fees to the local population in Uganda, as regulated under section 43 of the Wildlife Act, 2019. Additionally, it was related to an initiative at Fuzzy Systems Inc. aimed at improving local computer literacy levels and the usage of computers as teaching tools [50, 51]. Some of the known sustainable tourism efforts, as promoted by the International Institute for Peace through Tourism and adopted by the Uganda Tourism Board, are related to efforts at conserving the environment, and wildlife, and giving back to the community. These efforts recognize that tourism interests continue thanks to a welcoming ambiance provided by local populations [52].

### **Academic Support Programs**

Academic support in public schools is determined by government allocation and traditional stakeholders' contributions. The government, as a matter of policy motivation, should use the private sector for the public good. Traditional stakeholders are blending with new stakeholders, such as the private sector, to influence the public good, especially when training is seen as a form of public good that uses private resources. Any corporate gesture from the private sector that addresses the needs of the recipient, in this case, public schools, should positively influence the beneficiaries' motivation. Research has shown that academic performance is a result of safe and convenient shelter, nutritious meals, timely medical care, and spiritual and psychological support [53]. Where these needs are addressed, the pupils' academic performance should reasonably be higher. The presence of an academic support program, the belief in its intended benefit, and the teacher's involvement will greatly influence the predictability of a program's impact. Therefore, if an academic support program is in place, the teacher should be encouraged to understand and use it. Since most trainers are at liberty to use the method of their choice, academic support programs should aim at meeting their training requirements. As a result, academic support programs should comply with these priorities. Since academic performance is relative, academic support programs will, in addition, enable the recipients to achieve that unique personal satisfaction knowing that they belong socially and academically [54, 55].

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings highlight the interconnectedness of business, commerce, and education in shaping the quality of life, tourism, and academic performance in Western Uganda. By leveraging synergies between these sectors, stakeholders can create a conducive environment for sustainable development and inclusive growth. The study emphasizes the importance of targeted interventions, policy support, and community engagement to address challenges and unlock the full potential of the region.



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