



Enhancing Education in Uganda: Exploring the Impact of School-Business Partnerships in Low-Income and Urban Slum Communities

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the underexplored realm of school-business partnerships, focusing on their implementation and impact in low-income and urban slum areas of Uganda. Partnering with Catholic Relief Services and Imperial College, the study investigates how corporate volunteerism and resource provision from businesses contribute to the improvement of educational outcomes and societal development. Through a pilot initiative involving 13 schools and various businesses, the study examines the structural advantages and disadvantages faced by school leaderships in managing such partnerships. Utilizing data collected from corporate volunteers and school leadership, the study aims to fill the gap in evidence regarding the effectiveness of business engagement in education and its influence on students' academic and personal development.

Keywords: School-business partnerships, Education, Low-income communities, Urban slums, Corporate social responsibility, Volunteerism, Uganda

INTRODUCTION

School-business partnerships are quite common as is the literature discussing them. Partnership selection of lowest income and urban slum schools is quite rare, however. Catholic Relief Services, in collaboration with Imperial College, is the only organization that has conducted educational business partnership interventions in the chosen locations for this study [1-5]. Imperial College (London) adopted as its corporate social responsibility project in Uganda an infrastructural improvement initiative for the Catholic schools at the historical center of their partnership, which includes coordinated business volunteerism support across a range of different skill sets, many of which center on Ontario and Uganda and Kenya based businesses in technology, finance, consulting, supply chain, nursing, etc [6-9]. Each school had about 150 students in Uganda primary five to seven, with the supervision support of the school head teacher we randomly recruited, using a lottery, up to 10 students from each of the 13 study schools to participate in the business volunteerism program and continue their full-time studies [10-12]. Business engagement with primary and secondary schools can take many forms: school fees and resource provision by businesses and their employees; infrastructure construction, equipment donation, and child and teacher support by corporations; and internships, placement, and mentorship opportunities for students and staff by corporations [13-16]. Scores of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments (at national, provincial, or even school levels) have the policy, regulatory, or executive power to promote these engagements [17-20]. Specifically, business engagements that focus on building the human as well as social capital of students and staff at school can have substantial positive effects on learning outcomes and positive societal development [21-24]. A more nuanced focus on a partnership facilitated by a pilot initiative, direct data collection from the participating corporate volunteers, as well as close coordination with school leadership, can fill the dearth of evidence on corporate volunteerism in education, the formative business content knowledge, personal skills, and social and human capital lessons received by students who participate in business volunteerism in education, as well as the structural advantages and disadvantages school leaderships face when managing school-business partnership programs [25-26].

Benefits of School-Business Partnerships

Nevertheless, as found by various studies, the quality of education is not only determined by the mere availability of resources, but more critically, on the utilization of the available resources [27-28]. Other than the provision of resources, partnerships with business institutions similarly present new ideas and knowledge, and skills transfer to the teachers and school leaders [29-30]. It has been acknowledged that

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various scholars indicate partnerships expose teachers and school leaders to new ideas and create opportunities for personal and professional growth [31-34]. Sharing information and experiences with the partner institutions is significant in school improvement but more notably, the likelihood of the schools replicating the practices commonly associated with specific sectors of the economy, i.e. marketing, transparency, performance tracking, and environmental management [35-38]. Some schools had established tree nurseries, research farms, school banks, reading camps, school debates were organized and managed by the schools with a background on the specific workforce practices of the partner businesses [39-40]. Schools, as well as business institutions, derive both financial and reputational benefits from partnerships. An obvious benefit of partnerships is the availability of necessary resources. Often, financial resources or other requisite resources are limited for the schools. In this regard, partnerships enable schools to gain access to these resources through provision or linkage to potential benefactors [41-43]. For instance, in Central Uganda, due to a weak funding policy and mechanism by the government, pupils have often been required to construct rudimentary structures, including latrines and staff housing, to meet the daily needs [23]. With financial and technical assistance from the corporate institutions, the schools are able to overcome this challenge. Similarly, libraries and computer laboratories are constructed, textbooks, computers, educational software, sports wares, science equipment are supplied. As a result, financial and operational resources are significantly enhanced in the partner schools, hence raising the quality of education [8].

Improved Learning Opportunities

The provision of quality educational opportunities not only empowers the recipients but also the society at large. In reference to the National Planning Authority, the national development plan targets to have provisions of "improved learning opportunities and facilities to promote academic progression and the development of a skilled human resource base." Uganda's universal education policy envisions elevating literacy levels amongst its people to ninety-five percent, reducing the poverty level by half, achieving middle-income status as a country, as well as expanding democratic freedoms for all citizens [11]. Therefore, improved learning opportunities are not only a human right but also an obligation for the state. The paper explores the business supplement to Uganda's formal education system to alleviate the financial stagnation of the public education system [13]. The essence of the study is that a poverty-stricken educational system is a threat to human resources and the investment climate as well. The introduction of voluntary partnerships is essential for corporations since it ushers in a well-built workforce and educated people. Moreover, such partnerships help growing companies achieve economic growth and obtain new market entry opportunities [7]. Quality, relevant, and functional education is crucial in the provision of an investment climate and human resources. The formal education system has been challenged for decades, with issues of equity in access, gender, and social inequality. Predominantly, solutions to the crises in the education sector do not commend profit-oriented private sector involvement. Regardless, over the last two decades, the private sector has continued to be drawn into the provision and management of education services in numerous countries, which in return boosts not only the quality of learning but also enhances the education interface with the market system [12].

Enhanced Career Guidance

Education is a useful investment because it helps people to earn higher incomes from better jobs in the gender market. However, without the socializing role of career counseling programs in educational institutions, the graduates may reasonably be uncertain about their career prospects. The graduates may find themselves in career dead ends [30]. This, once more, leads to the business organization, which at the end are the employers of the graduates, being puzzled by the quality of the available human resource to do work. According to the study, the practical work or hands-on education helps the graduates to discover themselves and to make the appropriate decision for the "Heart" issue of their careers, primarily at the secondary school and as well as at the post-secondary school level. This was further supported by [42], who was of the view that through the partnership between schools and businesses, students will receive detailed and organized standard information about the functional and operating aspects of managerial types of education programs. Since school-business partnership goes mainly for practical work, the government (Education Act, 2008) recognizes the importance of school-business cooperation in the country's education system. This study was guided by the Cross-Links theory, which stipulates that school-business partnership leads to a sustainable cooperative relationship between the business organization. The business organization helps the students to understand and appreciate the relationship of the disciplines in their educational program and the subsequent application of the school work to the satisfaction of their future employers. This was supported by [23], who elaborated on a number of perceived benefits as a result of cooperation between schools and businesses. He mentioned some of the perceived benefits as an increase in vocational awareness by business organizations. This was also

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supported by [35]. To them, business organizations' vocational awareness leads to enhanced curriculum development in schools.

Access to Resources and Expertise

Access to expertise, on the other hand, is conceptualized as the availability of specialized knowledge or skills, often in the form of voluntary professional advice, consultation, training, experience, or informal help from specialized professionals. To a large extent, this view underscores the availability of skilled workers within a particular community who can substantially relieve teachers of some of their workloads. Some studies have shown that partnering with business makes it possible for schools to involve professionals to provide particular types of expertise [9]. For example, business representatives have been involved in Nepal to improve the management leadership of head teachers, school-based actions, and the quality of interactions with students. Moreover, notes that business partnerships have helped in upgrading the skills of teachers for the improvement of different academic disciplines. Agricultural projects in Brazil have offered schools in Tamburi Landesa with the expertise required to increase the use of land, improve as people's diets, and generate income [8]. Academic achievement. Access to resources generally refers to the ability to acquire and/or use particular resources, less frequently the process of mobilization and maintenance of useful resources is included. In corporate social responsibility literature, however, access to resources is considered as the ability to mobilize resources already possessed. Indeed, focusing attention on the need to exploit endogenous resources may be a more realistic model, especially for schools located in poor communities [5]. Research has shown that there are numerous social capital-related demands, such as community members in CE have been material help to supplement school income. Rogers also suggests that the presence of social capital can enhance the capacity of schools to access valued resources [9]. Such examples emphasize the numerous resources that schools can actually access from within local communities to support learning. Recently, the concept of access to resources and expertise has received considerable attention, especially in relation to the motivation and benefits for schools in various partnerships. Nevertheless, different perspectives exist regarding what it actually encompasses and how it is utilized to enhance educational activities [11].

Challenges and Solutions

Interestingly, the presence of school-business partnerships can influence the development of prejudices about the way students should behave and the types of jobs suitable for different genders. The study results indicated that the majority of businesses used funding as the mechanism for providing support to girls and boys, hence leading to prejudices about the types of jobs mainly dominated by girls and boys in the hinterland [8]. The discussions during the interviews and focus group discussions with teachers and students further indicated that the students perceived that the careers mainly dominated by female students and boys in the hinterland had less value compared to those provided in urban areas. Therefore, businesses need to implement programs that do not show gender bias [14]. This will help in promoting impartiality that can go a long way in helping both students to identify educational and career opportunities without any biases. Over-dependency is a key challenge that has been associated with school-business partnerships in Central Uganda. Study findings and responses from the head teachers indicated that most businesses provided one-time and walk-away programs to the schools without involving the students, teachers, and parents [17]. This contributed to over-dependency on the part of the schools. The individual interviews and focus group discussions with the teachers and parents further revealed that this limited their ability to develop projects on their own, which eventually led to limited development skills among the students. Therefore, there is a need for businesses to involve all stakeholders in developing, funding, and implementing school-business partnership programs [26].

Limited Financial Resources

A general education trend analysis on the influence of ICT on pre-college students from low-income countries dramatizes the reality that even in the most established digital divide regions, digital inequality is vain [26]. This study also covered low-income families whose average household income was closer to \$292 and mid-income earners whose average monthly income was estimated to be \$820. Uganda's per capita GDP is placed within \$206.5, producing an average household income that is lower than that for individuals who participated in the interviews during the course of the primary and secondary schools partnership inception [29]. Therefore, if students from low-income families ascertained the benefits of ICT and were actually prompted to engage in innovative activities, it is safe to argue that it is desk studies and discussions among teachers, school, and local development partners that have not keenly explored the unique benefits that TCAB's school business partnership is already offering in Central Ugandan rural schools [36]. National dialogue on closing the 'Homework Gap' among students in rural schools in the United States has observed increased online acts of participating as one of the probable solutions to this digital inequality [40]. More importantly, the realization of the role of broadband

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penetration in personal computing activities has led the United States Congress to ratify the Digital Gap Act of 2009. This digital equality policy intervention took into account additional benefits, such as fulfilling the needs of institutions of higher learning. It has been suggested that the broadband communication barrier to access the Internet in Africa has gone down from \$372 USD to \$118 USD. As a result, Uganda has managed to achieve Africa's cheapest-costing broadband internet access. The issue of limited financial resources came up in many student discussions, as well as interviews with parents and school teachers. As one participant recalled, there was no money in his family [26]. The major source of income, his parents' cow, had recently died and could not fund his education needs after primary seven. This financial constraint is responsible for student absenteeism, which punctuates their academic pursuits.

Cultural and Language Barriers

Cultural background and local language learning were also found to affect children's academic performance [9]. This study documents that parents' economic capabilities significantly influence school achievement and retention. In the views of the respondents, Nantong County parents have low expectations and aspirations for their children while Kiira Township parents are opining high expectations and aspirations for their children [9]. The latter expect their children to excel in school. Comments that Africa as a continent attempts to ascend out of poverty; it is faced with each and every millennium development goal. In Uganda specifically, the goal on universal primary education, on eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, and the goal on gender equality and women's empowerment mainly direct the country. Despite the introduction of universal primary education, educational success at the primary level continues to be influenced by numerous factors carried out an insightful study on children in northwestern Tanzania and found three factors that influence educational success: parents' education, socioeconomic background, and cultural practices [12]. This discrimination became particularly marked when children commenced primary three after they had been winnowed out of school. According to study, 70% of children from privileged backgrounds pass the primary school exit examination compared to only 5% of children from the poorest families.

Establishing Effective Communication Channels

One could, however, quickly notice that the already established communication networks between business and school could also play a significant role for high academic performance in secondary than primary schools. 95.00% of the best academically performing schools, having the students' population of over 1250, registered a working school-business communication network as compared to 87% of the less performing secondary schools, consequently supporting the argument [6]. High-performing primary schools, yet not as much as the high-performing secondary schools, had a communication network in place. There was sufficient publicly available data to ascertain the effectiveness of the established links. Firstly, even if secondary schools were able to set the communication links beyond their communities (churches, mosques, and parents and teachers associations) both at the local and organizational level, it was only but a few private primary schools that demonstrated this initiative [8]. Secondly, it was discovered that while business organizations chose to solely visit the schools to establish cooperation with the institutions in the running and administration of a few aspects of academic life, there were a few partnerships that tailored towards responding to very specific needs of the corporate organizations [6]. These aspects like the academic potential and its development are the pillars of every good school-business collaboration. School-business partnerships are more successful when school administrators establish an effective communication protocol between the school and the business because it determines if everything will function as planned or not. For instance, a dynamic means of communication does not only help a business set clear goals for their social engagements, but it also avails them the necessary pedagogical inputs. The study established that schools with a communication plan had a 12% increase in passing rates ($\text{pat} = 0.3$).

Developing Sustainable Partnerships

Since most businesses engage profitably in the communities where they are located, participating in breaking the cycle of poverty by providing education to under-resourced learners gives society a better reason to willingly participate with the owners of the business in fostering educational welfare. It is from this backdrop that Uganda introduced cooperation in the business community in the planning, development, and monitoring of curricula as a major policy for effective implementation of the lower curriculum [14]. This was justified by the fact that students should graduate with skills and competences that will be able to address societal and economic demands [26]. This needs to be complemented by the practical experiences of the private sector engaging in several community development ventures, projects, and so on. The nature of school-business partnerships suggests the involvement of both schools and the business community in mobilizing resources to improve learning outcomes. Business involvement shows a willingness to be involved with the problems of others, while schools and their leaders also facilitate

relations between the different sectors for a common goal [40]. The provisions of private resources that are both discretionary and non-discretionary are important in enhancing the welfare of people who are under-resourced. Through strategic partnerships, the business community and the other partners have a unique role in addressing, supporting, and advocating for the issues pertinent to the under-resourced learners and schools.

Successful School-Business Partnership Models

For example, students will actively recruit parents to work with and sign pledges of allegiance to buy healthy pre-cooked foods, and parents will boast or proudly mention children educated in schools that they participated in supporting. Across various schools, there may be a considerable amount of partnership connection among parents who visit the age of the enrolled children or engage in business activities for the benefit of schools [8]. Trust is likely to be a function of the quality of products, consistent broad participation, efficient operations, reliability in delivering products on time, building and maintaining relationships, and embodying the school-business partnership potential emanated by the business model. After the initial skepticism by parents, following the delivery of quality goods, school-business partnerships are more likely to entice and excite them [6]. The most successful school-business partnerships in central Uganda have characteristics that include, among others, meaningful and substantive mutual working relationships, hands-on practical and learning exposure for the young learners, along with skill and experiential learning, and the provision and availability of material and financial resources from businesses [14]. Partnerships that provide hands-on practical and learning exposure include activities such as internships and job placements, and business experiences, with lasting bonds or connections between everybody involved. Partnerships that earn the trust of parents, teachers, and communities at large are more successful in garnering support and commitment for the school-business partnership activities [18]. Participants' testimonials suggest that financial contributions from businesses and sales of products motivate and encourage children, parents, and schools to join and support additional cooperative measures.

CONCLUSION

School-business partnerships have the potential to significantly impact education outcomes in low-income communities. By providing financial resources, expertise, and hands-on learning opportunities, businesses can support schools in overcoming challenges and enhancing the quality of education. However, effective communication channels, sustainable partnership models, and addressing cultural and financial barriers are essential for maximizing the benefits of these partnerships. The findings suggest that collaborative efforts between schools and businesses can lead to positive outcomes for students, schools, and the broader community, ultimately contributing to societal development and poverty alleviation in Uganda.

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