

School and community in Uganda: Key predictors of community engagement in primary schools (0266)

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Leadership of schools is important for community engagement as is specialized educational training associated with administrative management. The leadership and preparation helps headmasters to effectively capitalize and leverage community engagement to the benefit of the school and the community at large. This presentation emphasizes the need for leadership development of headmasters that can enhance community participation. The results of this study address issues of sustainability for primary schools in Uganda and identify key predictors that seem to promote greater community involvement. At the center of this research is an apparent inconsistency between what is mandated by national policies and what is reported in the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ II) surveys (pupil, teacher, and headmaster). This report will bring attention to the importance of an organized consistent development program for headmasters in Uganda that includes how to mobilize the community to enhance education. Education in Uganda has been directed by national initiatives and international reforms and characterized by a tension between funding higher education reform and primary education programs.

The history of community involvement in education in Uganda cannot be overlooked. In 1937 there were 5,673 village schools that were defined as “a local community initiatives” (Hanson, 2010) that were staffed by Ugandans and developed with a combination of Christianity and indigenous knowledge. In 1937, the meager funding for these schools was withdrawn to be rechanneled to 218 approved primary schools (Hanson, 2010), and to expand the Uganda Technical School into an institution of higher education that eventually became Makerere University (Makerere, 2010). Before 1937, Ssekamwa (1997) says “parents, grandparents, and older siblings taught” the younger children. Tiberondwa (1998, 4) asserts that within “professional organizations, experts taught new members

specialized training such as healing and metallurgy.” As independence came to Uganda, there was a shift that Chesswas (1966) says centered on secondary and tertiary education as the means to “accelerate development”, not primary education. In the 1980s the World Bank cut funding for education but Hanson (2010) notes that it was community support that prevented a total collapse of the educational system. This short narrative demonstrates the presence of a strong interest among Ugandans to educate their children.

In 1994 research was conducted on training headmasters in Uganda and what training they said they needed (Pfau, 1996). Included in this list are several items centered on the ability to mobilize the community, all of which received moderately high importance, but as budgets contract more emphasis seems to be placed on the financial reporting and evaluating achievement. This became even more of an issue when in 1997 Uganda offered free education with no limitation as to the age of those who could attend primary schools, overwhelming the schools and duties of the headmaster. In 2000, another initiative following the Universal Primary Education (UPE) to "universalize primary education and massively reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade" (UNESCO, 2010) was launched. This initiative called Education for All (EFA) was designed to expand the quality of education, improve adult literacy rates, and provide free and compulsory primary education for all (Zuze & Leibbrandt, 2010). The good news is that the initiative is working, and the bad news is the initiative is working.

After years of government and international support; the children who were the first cohort of the EFA program are looking for opportunities to continue their education (World Bank, 2000) and higher education has been neglected making access to tertiary education difficult. Since teacher and headmaster development is part of tertiary education, this form of teacher training has also suffered the tug-of-war over resources in Uganda. A strong tertiary system is necessary to train and support teachers and administrators in the field.

This study only uses the variables associated with attitudes and actions towards community engagement. These attitudes include the prioritized importance of community involvement by the headmaster, how involved the community is in support of the school, several satisfaction criteria of the teachers associated with the community, and a question of prioritizing these considerations. Indices of combined experience indicators for the headmaster and level of community involvement were used to allow for descriptive statistical analysis and for multilevel modeling on the data for the primary schools in Uganda as reported in the SACMEQ II data from 163 school headmasters. In a recent report on the training of secondary school principals the authors say that headmasters play a pivotal role in implementing school reform and increasing the quality and efficiency of schools (Dejaeghere, Williams, & Kyeyune, 2009), and this research team agrees. This ongoing research makes a case that it is important that training in the areas of community outreach continue and seen as a pivotal part of training headmasters to implement reforms.

The research problems all center on community engagement. Do rural schools engender more community support than urban schools? Do headmasters who think community involvement is key to the success of the school encourage that attitude with the teachers? Are there predictors that promote more community support? Is the training level of the headmaster a predictor of attitudes and community support? The data is nested by geographic considerations and regions as well as by experience level of the headmaster but still analyzed using the within-school HLM models. The community support was divided between those activities requiring funds and those that require primarily time. The schools with a high percentage of the children who live in hostels or with other children were isolated to see if the community support was statistically significant from schools where most of the children lived with their families or relatives.

Community engagement and the attitudes of headmasters regarding the community is seen in this study, apart from the pre-service training, the resources of the school, and the educational attainment of the students because there can be great community involvement even if the resources are low, the educational background of the headmaster is significantly different, and the scores achieved by the students are less than other school with greater resources.

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