

# Education as a necessity of life: An exploration on Ugandan Education System Quality with reference to John Dewey's Philosophical Correlates

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## Abstract

Every country desires and aspires for an education system that caters for learners' physiological needs, belonging, love, self-esteem, security and self-actualisation at the top, which are rarely provided by a few countries. With a review focus on the Ugandan education system, several challenges related to the *education borrowing suggestions* as proposed by John Dewey have been attributed to creating an environment that has seen most graduates ending up unemployed, and with leadership challenges, inadequate funding, poor teacher perception, low research and innovations in higher institutions of learning, less involvement of the informal sector in development, low literacy levels, political interference among others. Thus this exploratory analytical-qualitative review focuses on John Dewey's teachings in his book *Education and Democracy*—specifically chapter 1, 'Education as Necessity for Life'—with attention on how education as an engine that empowers life, ensures independence through self-reliance, sustenance, freedom, and is syndrome-free to enhance appreciation of the contemporary trends in education—critical aspects that are extremely lacking within the current Ugandan education system and can impact on the future of education to the future of education as recommended in National Development Plan III (NDP III). Thus the review recommends that while reflecting on the state of the Ugandan education system, there is a need to revitalise the research and innovations in higher institutions, especially catering for

an integral-education system with a focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) from primary school to university, involvement of the informal sector through skills education as proposed by the Ugandan Vision 2040 and NDP III, as well as addressing low literacy levels and providing adequate teaching and learning through quality and balanced funding from all relevant government agencies and development partners.

#### KEYWORDS

education philosophy, international and comparative education, education policy

## Context and implications

### Rationale for the study

The UNBS (2016) census report in Uganda under the theme 'Education: A Means of Population Transformation' indicated that the net enrolment across all levels of education in Uganda was low and appalling and exploratory-wise. Based on John Dewey's teaching and emphasis on education as a necessity of life, it is a natural requirement for one to pursue happiness that can change and transform a person to a more useful resource any country would need, especially through attaining skills that can enhance problem-solving in life. The dilapidating quality of education offered as well as the outputs have been centrally attributed to lack of appreciation of the core purpose of education in developing and maximising the complex learning environment and experiences as an opportunity to grow the capacity to solve life skills as clearly proposed by Dewey.

### Why the new findings matter

Exploratory findings indicate that, for a country to grow its capacity, especially human education outputs, it should appreciate that learning never ends and thus it is a collective obligation for everyone—teachers, students, parents, local communities including local council's representatives and councillors—and in this way, learners need to grow with an enthusiastic attitude that can support their capacity to outgrow all obstacles that can hinder their lifetime excellence. As emphasised by Dewey, the education attained should enable them to acquire and attain employment opportunities without bias for both boys and girls that can fully build their capacity in decision making as well as building for them a better future through all rigorous and complex stages of education they undergo. For quality learning and development to take place, many students are comfortable, if their experiences and interests are engaged as well as practically shared.

### Implications for policy makers, practitioners and researchers

Schools should be promoting more social and emotional learning (SEL) through such instructional activities as service learning to help improve academic achievement. Consequently, further studies in this area are crucial to providing policy support for service learning. Thus the review recommends that while reflecting on the state of the Ugandan education system, there is a need to revitalise the research and innovations in higher institutions, especially catering for an integral-education system with a focus on STEM from primary school to university, involvement of the informal sector through skills education as proposed by the Ugandan Vision 2040 and NDP III, as well as addressing low literacy levels and providing adequate teaching and learning through quality and balanced funding from all relevant government agencies and development partners. On the part of the teachers, they should offer a learning environment that allows learners to utilise all their sensory exploration and this can be done through the use of an enabling learning environment that drives mastery and application of subject matter as well as transforming theory to experimental approaches. They should offer intellectual and emotional support that allows them to perform to the expected assessment levels and this can be directly done through setting up a whole school natural setting from which learners can best learn more about the surrounding environment both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers should enhance, according to Dewey, team learning by incorporating and adopting contemporary educational practices aiming at improving integral learning, and problem-solving attainment as well as enhancing individualised curricula instructions. On the side of the Ministry of Education as well as the government in general, there is a need to renew their obligation and commitment to the attainment of an education that is all-around through the promotion of skills-based education as well as STEM and agricultural teaching to enhance its agenda in the NDP III, the main objective of which is to transform the country into a highly sought-after skills-based human capital sector, and this can be done through enhancing funding for all programmes that can be attainable to support learning and teaching in Ugandan education institutions.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is an engine of personal development and it is the most powerful weapon that can be used to change the world. It is perhaps the most important tool to change one's life. The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success. It contributes to nation-building and reconciliation. In this sense, it affirms the fact that education is a necessity to life (Munoz-Najar Galvez et al., 2020; USAID, 2013). Education is what a person goes through in life from birth to death. It is acquired informally, formally and non-formally (Education White Paper, 1992). As we attain knowledge the standard of life is renewed and this is an aspect of experience as hinted at in the Chapter 1 of John Dewey's Book. Experience is what we do with what happens to us but not what we go through. After an experience, learning takes place and this is why companies and employers seek experienced personnel. In line with Chapter 1 of Dewey, it is evident that education transforms an individual's life (Dewey, 1916). People are living in a changing society and it is important or prudent or significant positive educational changes. This too qualifies education as a necessity of life.

Education for a child begins at home. It is a lifelong process. Education certainly determines the quality of an individual's life by equipping them with knowledge, skills as well as developing their personality and attitude. Most noteworthy, education affects the chances of employment for people. A highly educated individual is probably very likely to get a good job (Dewey, 1916). It adds value like any other basic need. Though the education roots are bitter, as commonly said, those who accept to experience it, secure and enjoy higher income. Higher education and varied experience through different means can enable one to get high-paying and expert jobs to renew life. This in turn affirms the fact that education is a necessity (Dewey, 1916). The sole aim of every education system is to promote life through improving the economy whose user is the human being his needs are never satisfied fully until a person dies. Just like the body must be fed with food daily this bridges the aim of education to reaffirm it to be a necessity of life.

People with experience are treasured and considered as a huge advantage due to them being a responsible and knowledgeable workforce. Acquired education equips people with problem-solving skills that encourage them to turn challenges into opportunities. Education teaches us how to develop critical and logical thinking and make independent decisions formally and informally.

Educated people in any other form of human survival, display humility, approachability, humbleness, and involvement in voluntary activities that promote environmental sustainability and respect for humanity as the most respected virtues of education a necessity. However, if one has spent years educating themselves, they should be able to make sound decisions on these various learning quandaries. Not only are people able to form their own opinions, but they are also good at finding solid and reliable arguments and evidence to back up and confirm their decisions. This is also an element of renewal that stands out for education as a necessity.

Experienced people in certain disciplines often enjoy a prosperous and happy life. Education has always secured respect from society. To ensure a comfortable lifestyle, people should educate themselves and obtain a well-paid job to be successful and satisfied. It helps gain a better reputation and increases the chances of climbing the career ladder more easily and faster. In turn, it provides financial resources for stable lives—people can afford to buy their own house or apartment and thus secure their children's happiness and success (Dewey, 1916). Furthermore, being able to own your own home provides stability and increases self-confidence. It leads to creating a positive environment for families and communities.

## Review purpose and focus

The sole purpose of this review is to explore the implications of John Dewey's philosophical correlates on the quality of Uganda's education system in line with SDG4 with a focus on reaffirming that education is a necessity of life as reflected in his book *Education and Democracy*, chapter 1 'Education as a Necessity of Life'.

## UNPACKING JOHN DEWEY'S POSTULATES ON THE NECESSITY OF EDUCATION: A CONTEXT OF UGANDA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

In consonance with Dewey's teaching in Chapter one context, education should guide people on how to make use of the available resources with control and without over-exploitation. Experiences acquired should enable everyone to understand how valuable it is to live in a

stable and secure community and beyond. It should intrigue people to take part in projects that help improve not only their neighbourhood but society as well (Dewey, 1916). In addition, when people can afford their own homes, they are more likely to take part not only in improving their homes but in solving local problems, as well. After all, it is quite important to get involved and give a hand to the less fortunate ones to build a better place for all of us to live in and in this respect, education becomes a pivotal necessity of life because it unearths all the life aspects and realms of knowledge.

The quality of a country's education system defines the quality of the citizens it has, thus education is a vehicle of renewal for which the modern society should hinge on for invention and revolution as stipulated in Gumedé (2015). Gumedé further asserts that education policies should be hinged greatly on the informal setting because it is a major supplier of the people's needs. Thus there is a need to dive into the culture, history and other important aspects so that they would be able to contribute to the continuity of life to mould people into leaders not only with knowledge about (college) subjects but also show them how to lead with emotions and true values. Educated people can easily differentiate between right and wrong, helping to reduce the crime rate. However, some bad events are driven by sophisticated educated people so make room for that possibility too.

With a focus on continuity of life, Dewey gives impetus to continual preadaptation of the environment to the needs of living organisms. This reminds educators in developing countries like Uganda of reforming education through inculcating individuals with the spirit of patriotism—a feeling for one's country wholeheartedly (Education White Paper, 1992). Education should be able to create democracy in all institutions and societal sections in all aspects of practices including respect, love, integrity, the neighbour principle, and conservation of natural resources, to increase a sense of responsibility and accountability to society and the state as a whole. In line with the above to promote continuity, experiences acquired should aid to thrive and interrelate freely with each other irrespective of caste, race, gender or religion. Educated people should be treated as equals based on their knowledge and competence. In addition to this, educated people are open-minded and can listen and accept other people's views regardless of the fact of how different they are. Education offers the possibility to live independently and thus be free. It is our shelter against financial storms and wrong decisions and all these are virtues that are associated with education as a necessity for life.

As unpacked in paragraph four of the chapter:

“born immature, helpless, without language, beliefs, ideas, or social standards.” In this regard, education becomes a key to turning a weakness into a strength, guiding us to the right destiny, nurture and nature to what we what. This is possible when an enabling environment is created to enable everyone to discover his uniqueness. Uniqueness is the product of refinement, refinement is a product of significance and significance is a product of greatness.

(Dewey, 1916, p. 6)

To arrive at greatness, you need a conducive environment that can encourage you to exploit the available opportunities to venture into your destiny. The best destiny is the one you discover on your own. This too affirms the findings of B.F. Skinner, Thorndike and Piaget on the importance of self-discovery and learning by doing through the adequate utilisation of the available learning resources. More importantly, education provides us with considerable mental agility to make the right decisions and spring into action when needed. Many types of research show that educated women can more easily stand up against gender bias and marital violence as they have improved their decision-making capabilities (UWEZO, 2010).

In line with the last two paragraphs of the chapter, the focus of education is on the next generation. This unpacks that through education we can train people who can replace old ones to enable the cycle to continuity just as plants and animals renew by reproduction, soil by weathering and decomposition and water through a rain cycle involving the evaporation, condensation, transpiration and finally precipitation (Dewey, 1916). To be successful in life depends on the successors you have trained who can take over. Education therefore should be a tool for procreation, renewal and continuity by the process of learning and teaching to pass on knowledge and skills to sustain different generations.

## UNDERPINNING REVIEW THEORY

This review borrows Abraham Maslow's theory of human motivation to underpin and offer an alternative point of discussion to weigh the major education drives as a satisfier and a motivator for one to attain the best out of it, irrespective of the profession they undertake. This theory was put to use in 1943 by psychologist Abraham Harold Maslow and its focus on the hierarchy of human needs became one of the popular and extensively cited theories of motivation. For any person to exist, human needs are a necessity not just a luxury. According to Maslow, human behaviour is related to these needs. It is adjusted as per the nature of the needs to be satisfied. In the hierarchy of needs theory, Maslow identified five types/sets of human needs arranged in a hierarchy of their importance and priority. He concluded that when one set of needs is satisfied, it ceases to be a motivating factor. Thereafter, the next set of needs in the hierarchy order takes its place. These needs in the hierarchy can be compared to a pyramid. For individuals to acquire these needs they need to interact with various environments, including schooling, which bring about the aspect of experiences depending on the level of education attainment.

To further illustrate this in the Ugandan context and in lieu of Maslow's theory, a motivation underpins almost all higher human needs and those which are basic like education. That is why Ugandan parents spend lots of resources to fund top levels of education (university education). At the lowest level, there will be the first set of needs which can be described as basic needs and are universal. This will be followed by other sets of needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often portrayed in the shape of a pyramid with the largest, most fundamental needs at the bottom and the need for self-actualisation and transcendence at the top. In other words, the crux of the theory is that individuals' most basic needs must be met before they become motivated to achieve higher-level needs. The most fundamental four layers of the pyramid contain what Maslow called 'deficiency needs' or 'd-needs': esteem, friendship and love, security, and physical needs. If these 'deficiency needs' are not met—except the most fundamental (physiological) need—there may be no physical indications, but the individual will feel anxious and tense. Maslow's theory suggests that the most basic level of needs must be met before the individual will strongly desire (or focus motivation upon) the secondary or higher level needs. Consonant with Dewey's teaching, are these needs attained by the learners at the critical stages of the education offered? Maslow also coined the term 'meta-motivation' to describe the motivation of people who go beyond the scope of their basic needs and strive for constant betterment. The human brain is a complex system and has parallel processes running at the same time; thus many different motivations from various levels of Maslow's hierarchy can occur at the same time. Just like Dewey, Maslow spoke clearly about these levels and their satisfaction in terms such as 'relative', 'general', and 'primarily'. Instead of stating that the individual focuses on a certain need at any given time, Maslow stated that a certain need 'dominates' the human organism. Thus Maslow acknowledged the likelihood that the different levels of motivation could occur at any time in the human mind, but he focused on identifying the basic types of motivation and the order in

which they would tend to be met (Prasad, 2010). He further asserts that humans are wanting beings, that is, their wants are growing continuously even when some wants are satisfied. Human needs are of a varied and diversified nature. They can be arranged in a hierarchy of importance progressing from a lower to a higher order of needs. Needs have a definite hierarchy of importance. As soon as needs on a lower level are fulfilled, those on the next level will emerge and demand satisfaction. With a clear relationship of chapter one of Dewey (1916) in relation to the above theory, it's reaffirmed that education is a necessity of life because an individual dive through the hierarchies of needs as discussed by Maslow and a complete picture of education layers (experiences) and needs are ably explained. Education in many of the sub-Saharan countries such as Uganda is not taken for granted or seen as a luxury but a basic need from which rights and improvement in peoples' socio-economic status is presupposed to emanate. It's also assumed and believed that in gender constrained or gender violence skewed communities, education is not only a necessity but a basic need or channel through which many social and economic ills may be fought for example it curbs early marriages, criminality among the youth, builds a creative and innovative society which Maslow noted. Such an empowered society craves for more needs and satisfaction such as better lifestyle, and eventually self-actualization as a final goal for all who seek education as path to excellence.

## VALIDATING EDUCATION AS A LIFE NECESSITY: OTHER PHILOSOPHICAL PROPONENTS

It is imperative to appreciate the fact that education is a necessity for life as it enables everyone to discover their potential in an attempt to better the society at play. This too depends on the way the education is structured from the initial point of view. Based on real experiences from my institution, education is a great engine for personal development (Soudien et al., 2014). It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, the son of a miner can become the head of mine and the son of a farmer can become the president of a great nation. It is what we have, not what we are given that separates one from the other. This is related to the government of Uganda's education agenda relative to SDG4. The government of Uganda considers education a basic human right. Participating in education is also viewed as part of the solution to reducing poverty. In as much as the government of Uganda is dedicated to providing equitable access to quality and affordable education to all Ugandans as seen with the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997 and the introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007. These policies saw a drastic increment in the number of students at primary level from 3.1 million in 1996 to approximately 5.3 million in 1997, which is an increase of about 73% (MoES, 1998; UBOS, 2001) and this has gone on to date. The education sector in Uganda is constrained by many challenges. These include a high level of teacher and student absenteeism, weak school-level management structures, inadequate availability of learning materials, and large class sizes. Another major issue also is that the unavailability of teachers and their accommodation more so in disadvantaged (hard to reach) areas in the context of Mandela's view of education as a cursor for the poor and is challenged by the many challenges therein.

Additionally, the late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere said that education is that aspect of knowledge and skills acquired by individuals as they interact with other people or their environment, which that enables them to be self-reliant. Educated persons should be helped by their experiences, to be a useful tool in society around them and the nation at large. Therefore, based on their perception of education, it should be regarding the individual's country's development economically, socially, politically and educationally in an attempt to establish a

stable society in all aspects of life. This seems to be missing currently and explains why the cause of high rates of unemployment is due to a mismatch in education strategies as well as procedures for implementation. Unfortunately, in the Ugandan context good education is ring-fenced by high tuition. The poor cannot access elite schools and thus the poor children cannot interact with those of the rich.

Gumede (2015) appreciates education as a necessity ably emphasised but he unearthed that for education to meet that goal, the informal sector should be fused to the formal sector because most of the economic activities, whether in urban or rural areas, are in the informal sector and so it is crucial to find ways to bring the informal sector both urban and rural into the supply chain of private and public companies—as happens in Japan and South Korea where, for example, families working from home make components that go into the making of motor vehicle, a critical focus on STEM promotion right from high school teaching onwards. This may not be possible in Uganda's constrained environment.

In line with the above, Kajubi comments that higher institutions of learning should champion research and innovations to better our education (Senteza Kajubi, 1981). Academicians need to be motivated to engage with communities more and university education needs to be restructured to support outreaches. Our education system should be practical and economically viable. Informal education is aimed at improving literacy but currently too many students are not reading with proficiency, and therefore, are at risk of missing out on the opportunity to reach their full potential. For decades there have been debates about whole language and phonics while our students still lag. It is time to put a deep focus on teaching literacy with a balanced approach (NAPE, 2015). The new school curriculum (lower secondary), it is hoped, will try to solve this challenge.

UNESCO (2015) reports that many school leaders enter into the position with high hopes of having a deep impact but are not always prepared for what they find. In this regard, making education a necessity becomes a dream. Sometimes they may be influenced by their superiors to lose track of what they expected to do. School leadership has the potential to be awesome. And when I mention school leadership, I am also referring to department chairs or grade-level leaders. Unfortunately, not all leaders feel prepared for the position. Leadership is about understanding how to get people to work together, having a deep understanding of learning, and building the capacity of everyone around them. This means that university programmes, feeder programmes, and present leaders who coach those who want to be leaders, need to find ways to expose potential leaders to all of the goodness, as well as the hardships, that come with the position. Different studies on the state of school leadership in Uganda presents a dire concern (Mitana et al., 2018).

One of the areas of concern is the perception that educators (i.e., leaders, and teachers, among others) have of their students. Sometimes we lower our expectations of students because of the background they come from, and other times we hold unreachable expectations because we believe our students are too coddled. Even worse, cases of educators talk about certain students in very negative ways, with a clear bias that must get in the way of how they teach those students because education is a necessity of life. When the learners are demoralised, their chances of achieving their potential become limited. In this context school leadership must play a positive role in cultivating students' emotional intelligence and drives looking at education as a means to an end.

Political inference is both a catalyst for development as well as failure. In line with the discussed chapter (Kajubi, 1989), education should emphasise patriotism to avert discrimination of any kind to meet the goal of education as a necessity of life as clearly illustrated in the chapter. Currently, the story seems to be different in the sense even a mere transfer requires a bribe and the result of this is automatically personal gain, which is quality service delivery. Negative campaigns and bad behaviour by adults at the same time tell students to be respectful to each other. We need to open up this dialogue in our classrooms and talk

about how to respectfully agree or disagree. Additionally, we have to wonder how the campaigns and ultimate presidential decisions will impact education.

For too long we have agreed upon words like 'time on task', which often equates to students being passive in their learning. It is time we focus on student engagement, which allows us to go from surface-level to deep-level learning and on to transfer-level learning. It also helps balance the power in the room between adults and students. That is why, currently, we need to use participatory methods in all forms of teaching and leadership in our various institutions as it promotes self-research and discovery.

Different reports such as UWEZO (2014) do sanction that inadequate teaching learning aids and technology in education is a powerful crusade that is sweeping through schools nationwide. After all, today's students have grown up with digital technology and expect it to be part of their learning experience. But how much of a role should it play in education? Proponents point out that educational technology offers the potential to engage students in more active learning, as evidenced in flipped classrooms. It can facilitate group collaboration and provide instant access to up-to-date resources (Muweesi et al., 2021). Teachers and instructors can integrate online surveys, interactive case studies, and relevant videos to offer content tailored to different learning styles. Indeed, students with special needs frequently rely on assistive technology to communicate and access course materials (NAPE, 2015). However, it is worth noting that various reports, such as the state of information and communication technologies (ICT) in Ugandan schools, reveal that close to 80% of the schools do not have adequate ICT facilities. It is also reported that even the teachers cannot effectively use ICT for pedagogical purposes (Gillwald et al., 2019).

Some people believe educational reform means making changes to the system to ensure students from all over the country measure up to the same set of standards. The theory behind standardised tests is that they provide an objective measure of student performance and help ensure that all students become proficient in the course material. Standardised testing was meant to hold public schools accountable if they failed to provide effective instruction to all students. Without such measures, it is argued that low-income and minority students can fall through the cracks and not receive the same quality education as their more affluent white counterparts, yet education is a necessity of life (UNESCO Report, 2015).

## ARISING CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Synoptically, it is relatable to address the gaps in education to enable the learners to achieve their dreams and to make this world a better place for us to stay in and carry on with daily activities. Political interference in education should be regulated because education is a sensitive venture that needs to be handled critically. Learners and other stakeholders from different walks of life should not be discriminated against, and learner-centred teaching methods and democratic principles of administration and management should be embraced. The government should create strategies to achieve its Vision 2040 agenda objectives through developing supporting programmes targeting disadvantaged children and youth, expanding and improving school facilities, improving instructional processes leading to student achievement, and strengthening the teaching force, which can also support the attainment of SDG4 focus on quality education as tackled in this paper's main purpose. Thus, it recommended that education provided should be affordable because everyone needs it to thrive and survive in the twenty-first century and beyond; education availed to people should be functional to enable people to use it in their daily operations to solve problems and improve their standards through attainment of day to day life experiences through the acquired knowledge, skills and values expressed as experience. Experience helps people to solve problems with ease, hence it is a necessity as

clearly emphasised in this article; realistic education should be emphasised as affirmed by realists and pragmatists. In this regard accumulated skills and knowledge acquired should be applied to real-life situations to fulfil the philosophy of education (education as a necessity for life) by meeting society's needs and inspirations.

A realistic curriculum would invent an education programme that produces graduates who are capable of creating and recreating ideas, as emphasised by the constructivism and progressivism schools of philosophies which emanate from John Dewey's education philosophies. It would aim at producing Ugandan graduates who are job creators as opposed to job seekers as evidenced by the current education system. In this regard it is not serving as a necessity but rather a liability as it has contributed a lot to unemployment and an increase in poverty levels; which turns contrary to John Dewey's goals of a pragmatic education. Higher institutions should emphasise research and innovations to promote further discoveries and solve the problems in question. This is the only end-line to enhance STEM education with the outputs (professionals) attained. The government of Uganda has gone ahead to establish an independent Ministry of Science and Technology outside that of education to bridge such gaps by funding prototyping among the scientists, and innovations like COVID drugs by universities and medical schools among others. Also to attain a quality education system and reaffirm education as a necessity of life with a focus on the role of teachers, the government should strengthen teacher competency, resources, motivation, and accountability, and establish a supportive enabling environment for strengthening teacher competency; offer financial advisory services, technical, and capacity building for various school project implementation, effect learner data management, monitoring and academic performance evaluation; likewise, teacher payroll systems should be improved, and retooling to support capacity development, especially with the drastic technological changes that call focus on the teaching of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, whose work cadres are still lacking in most of the developing countries, including Uganda.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of Interest in this study.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The review data source is available.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was based on publicly available secondary data. No ethical issues were involved in the study.

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