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## Educating Adults in Uganda: Findings and Signals

**T**his article summarizes a 1999 evaluation of adult literacy programs in Uganda. The main program was the Government of Uganda's "Functional Adult Literacy Program" (FAL), launched in 1992 and in 1999 active in 26 of 45 districts. In addition, a number of programs run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were also evaluated.

The evaluation looked at the longer term outcomes of these programs, not their processes or immediate results. It drew a nationwide sample of 800 literacy graduates, along with smaller samples of non-literate people, pupils from Primary Grades 3 and 4, literacy instructors and local leaders and officials. For adult education, this was an exceptionally large and comprehensive effort.

### What questions did the evaluators address?

The evaluation asked four main questions:

- How well do adults, who successfully complete a literacy course, remember how to read, write and calculate?
- To what extent do they use their skills?

- In comparison with non-literates, (a) what knowledge of "functional" topics do they exhibit; (b) what are their attitudes to the "functional" topics; and (c) to what extent do they put into practice what they have learned?
- As several approaches to teaching literacy are current, which is the most effective and what are the comparative costs? In particular, how does the REFLECT (Revised Freirean Literary Education and Communication Technique) approach compare with the others?

### What did the evaluation find?

The following section simply reports the main findings of the evaluation.

*1<sup>st</sup> Question:* How well do adults, who successfully complete a literacy course, remember how to read, write and calculate? Note that nearly three-quarters of the sampled literacy graduates had been to primary school. Indeed, more than one-third had had between five and eight years of primary schooling. Charts 1 to 3 lay out the percentages of correct responses from the total adult sample, three sub-groups of the sample and the Primary Grade 4 pupils (as expected, the Grade 4 pupils outperformed the Grade 3 pupils on all the tests).

Evidently, even the adults with no schooling did better than the Grade 4 pupils in comprehension and calculation. However, in writing, the Grade 4 pupils on average did better than the adult groups.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Question:* To what extent do the graduates use their skills? Eighty percent of the sampled graduates reported that they used and valued their new skills and knowledge. Sixty percent reported involvement in income generating activities connected with their classes and skills, and claimed that their lives had improved as a result. The 20 percent, who reported little or no use of their skills, felt they had not attained a sufficient level of skill.

As for their aspirations for future learning, nearly half the graduates wanted to learn English. Other desires each accounted for only small proportions of the respondents.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Question:* In comparison with adults who are not literate, (a) what knowledge of "functional" topics do literacy graduates exhibit; (b) what are their attitudes to the "functional" topics; and (c) to what extent do they put into practice what they have learned? The data showed that on all three aspects, the literacy graduates did indeed do somewhat better than the non-literates. However, on one-third of the questions, the graduates did only a little better, which suggested that a portion of the curriculum was imparting information that was already generally known.

The data on attitudes and practices showed that larger proportions of the literacy graduates tended to express modern attitudes and adopt modern practices. However, higher proportions of both

graduates and non-literates tended to express modern attitudes than actually to adopt modern practices. That is, knowledge and attitudes did not automatically translate into practices.

*4<sup>th</sup> Question:* As several approaches to teaching literacy are current, which is the most effective and what are the comparative costs? In particular, how does the REFLECT<sup>1</sup> approach compare with the others? As it turned out, the evaluators were able to compare only a few FAL and REFLECT groups, so that the findings could be classed only as tentative.

REFLECT seemed more effective with participants with schooling, while FAL appeared more effective with non-literate adults. In knowledge, attitudes and practices, there appeared to be no difference between FAL and REFLECT participants.

*Finally, what were the costs of the programs?* Taking into account the well-known difficulties and cautions in calculating the costs of adult education programs, the estimates suggest that to produce one successful graduate:

FAL required	US\$4-\$5
REFLECT required	US\$12 - \$15
SOCADIDO required	US\$20;
Primary school 4 required:	US\$60 per pupil completing Primary 4 in four years

The relatively low FAL estimate resulted from not providing any payment for the instructors. The NGOs gave their instructors regular honoraria. Even so, they were still less costly than four years of primary schooling.

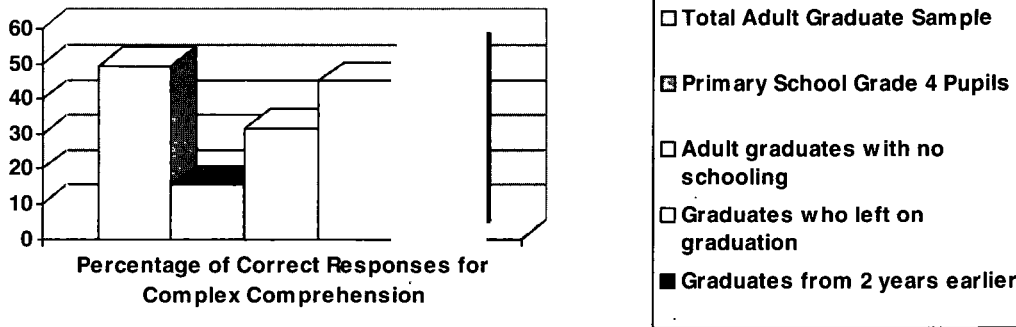
## Summary of signals

In summary, the Uganda evaluation has left some questions open, but confirmed some signals from elsewhere in the world. The first question left open is the treatment of the literacy instructors. The FAL instructors were all unpaid volunteers, whereas those of the NGOs received regular honoraria. The FAL facilitators had had on average less schooling, less initial training, no refresher training and little supervisory support. Yet their graduates did as well as those in the other programs on the tests of literacy skills and in responses to questions on information, attitudes and practices. The uncertainty that this engenders about what might be the wisest policy for facilitators is reflected in the conflicting experiences elsewhere in the world.

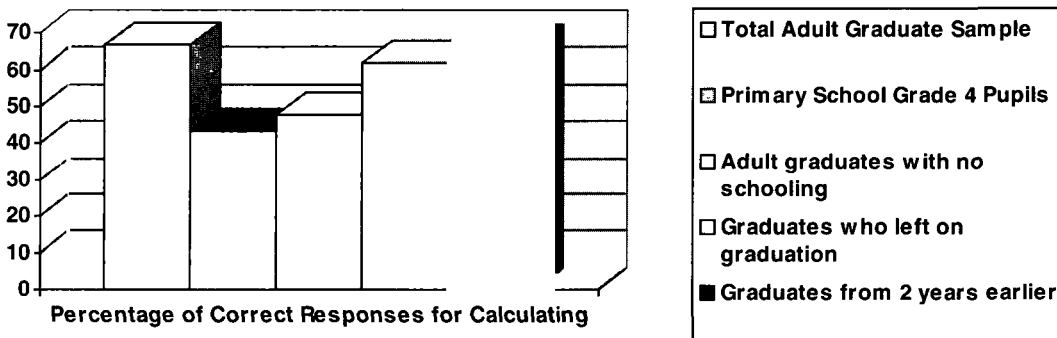
The second open question is the balance to be sought between a general national curriculum and an array of curricula tailored to suit different interest groups. FAL offers a general, national curriculum, while REFLECT derives its learning from immediately local situations. The evaluation found them apparently equally effective.

The third open question is relative efficacy of the various instructional methods on offer. Examining only the approaches of FAL and REFLECT, the evaluation could not judge either program more or less effective than the other. The major difference between the two programs is that the government uses primers, while REFLECT in principle works with its participants to construct a customized curriculum out of their own local circumstances, living conditions and environment.

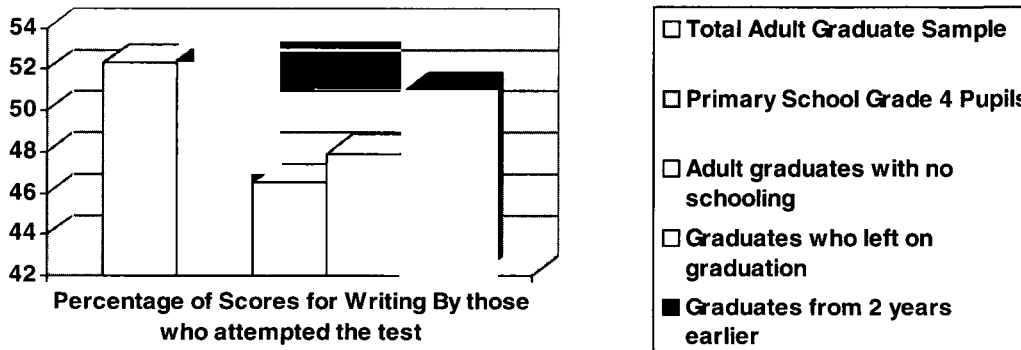
**Chart 1. Reading-complex comprehension: percentages of correct responses**



**Chart 2. Calculating: percentages of correct answers**



**Chart 3. Writing: average percentage scores obtained by those who actually attempted the writing test**



The fourth and last open question is the strength of demand for literacy education among the really illiterate adult population. Among the sampled graduates, those with some schooling outnumbered the really illiterate by three to one. Did this mean that illiterate people failed to enroll in the program? Or that most illiterate enrollees failed either to complete the course or to learn enough to succeed at the test?

The signals that the evidence from Uganda tends to confirm are as follows:

- The central importance of careful preparation and sound implementation. Reliable delivery and sound instruction seem more important than methods and materials.
- Programs run by governments can be as effective as those offered by other agencies. This does not argue that governments should be the only agencies to undertake literacy programs. The NGOs in Uganda clearly deliver equally effective programs. For policy, the strong signal is that frameworks to encourage active, complementary partnerships between governments and other agencies would best serve the people who could benefit from adult basic education. In addition, the records of NGOs in taking initiatives, exploring fresh approaches and in sustaining public interest in adult basic education signal that policy makers should capitalise on and promote these synergies.

- The self-targeting nature of adult basic education as an instrument to benefit poor people, especially women—most of the sampled graduates were women and came from the poorer households of their communities.
- The desirability of accommodating two streams of demand for adult basic education: from the wholly unschooled and from the partially schooled. Enrolling partially schooled people along with unschooled people could inhibit the latter and frustrate the aims of a program.
- The ability of adults of all ages to learn the basic skills of reading, writing and calculating: the Ugandan evidence shows that some 200–300 hours of instruction by relatively untrained instructors can enable even older, non-literate adults to achieve and retain literacy skills.
- The need for a longer view of literacy education as part of a progressive and cumulative process to enable the “average” adult to attain adequate mastery of the basic skills and to continue learning how to apply them productively. The Ugandan evaluation found many people continuing in literacy classes long after they had graduated, simply because they wished to maintain and improve their skills.
- The need to develop ways of combining basic education in a vernacular with an introduction to an official language. The findings in Uganda corroborate those in other multi-lingual countries, where only one or two official lan-

guages enable people to deal with official signs, documents and procedures, as well as facilitate access to waged and salaried employment. The widespread desire in Uganda for instruction in English has its counterparts all over Africa and elsewhere.

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*This article was written by John Oxenham. A 30-page summary of this evaluation is given in **Adult Education and Development**, Vol.55, 2000, pp.229-259. A fuller account is available in **Adult Literacy Programs in Uganda**, World Bank Africa Region Human Development Series, 2001 (117 pages). A comprehensive 300-page description of the methodology and findings is available from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Government of Uganda. The evaluation team from Makerere University's Institute of Adult and Continuing Education included Prof. Anthony Okech, Dr. Anne Ruhweza Katahoire, Dr. Teresa Kakooza and Dr. Alice Ndidde. Prof. Roy Carr-Hill of London and York Universities was also a member of the team. The Norwegian Government's Trust Fund with the World Bank financed the evaluation.*

<sup>1</sup> This educational strategy was developed by the international NGO, ActionAid, in 1993 and is now widely adopted/adapted.