

Researchers

Laura Chioda
University of California, Berkeley

Paul Gertler
University of California, Berkeley

Timeline

2012-

Using Evidence to Inform a Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship Training for Secondary School Students in Uganda

Abstract

Educate! is using results to strengthen its model as it scales across sub-Saharan Africa.

In Uganda, researchers partnered with IPA and Educate! to evaluate the impact of the Educate! Experience program, a leadership and social entrepreneurship skill development program for secondary school students. Four years after the intervention, researchers found that the program had strong and meaningful impacts on Educate! graduates' investments in education (especially among women) and soft skills; it also generated notable social spillovers in terms of gender norms and intimate partner violence. In keeping with its reputation as a learning organization, Educate! is using evidence from the evaluation and other studies to further strengthen its programs. Educate! is in the process of scaling its model and working with nearly 50,000 youth through its direct delivery programs and reaching as many as 500,000 students through its education reform partnerships in Uganda, Rwanda, and Kenya, with plans to replicate its model across sub-Saharan Africa.



© Cartier Philanthropy. Photographer: Andrea Borgarello

The Challenge

Education systems in Africa face many challenges in equipping students with the skills needed to be successful in adulthood. While secondary schools are largely fee-based and require substantial investments for poorer families, graduates face few formal employment opportunities and often lack the entrepreneurial skills required to start or operate their own small businesses. Teaching students the skills required to be successful in life or to compete in the formal labor market has the potential to reduce youth unemployment, drive economic growth, and reduce poverty. But whether such skills can be taught is an open question and a policy priority.

The Evidence

Researchers (Dana Carney (UC Berkeley), Laura Chioda (World Bank), David Contreras (UC Berkeley), and Paul Gertler (UC Berkeley)) partnered with IPA and Educate! to conduct a randomized evaluation of the Educate! Experience program, a leadership and social entrepreneurship skill development program for youth in their last two years of secondary education. The program was successfully implemented during the 2012-2013 school years. A follow-up survey was conducted in 2017 to analyze the impact of the program on students' skills, economic outcomes, educational attainment, community involvement, and gender

empowerment outcomes in Uganda. The study also investigated whether the program impacted gender social norms and intimate partner violence (IPV)-related outcomes.

Four years after the intervention, researchers found that the Educate! Experience program had strong and meaningful impacts on Educate! graduates' intra- and inter-personal soft skills such as creativity, grit, ability to manage stress, persuasion, and self-efficacy. Educate! graduates appear to focus more on long-term goals and report being more in control of aspects of their lives, as well as more empowered to implement actions towards achieving their plans.

Educate! graduates were also more likely to have graduated from secondary school, and more likely to select business and STEM majors in tertiary education. Female graduates were more likely to be enrolled in or to have completed tertiary education. In addition, program graduates reported having fewer sexual partners, being less sexually active, and waiting longer to start a family than non-graduates. They also expressed reduced social acceptability of violence and reported fewer threats of and lower incidence of physical violence. The program had limited impacts on knowledge of graduates' hard skills such as business knowledge. Educate! graduates were, however, more knowledgeable about identifying opportunities for business and win-win strategies and better at deliberative dialogue compared to those in the comparison group.

At the time of the four-year follow-up, the new skills had not translated into higher rates of employment or higher wages, earnings, revenues, or profits relative to the comparison group. However, it is important to note that more than one-third of the youth in the study sample were still pursuing education at the time of the four-year follow-up. It is therefore too early to assess whether the program impacts labor market outcomes; a longer-term follow up is needed. As highlighted above, the Educate! program led to important changes in youths' mindset, soft skills, and investments in education, dimensions typically positively correlated with economic outcomes.

The Impact

In keeping with a history of using evidence to inform program design, Educate! is using these results to update the program's curriculum. Following recommendations from the researchers and lessons from other studies, Educate! has planned key revisions of the curriculum including adding negotiation skills modules, strengthening the focus on business and career planning, exploring new modalities to remain engaged with youth during high school and after they graduate from secondary school.

Educate! also plans to integrate aspects of another evidence-backed entrepreneurship model, called Skills for Effective Entrepreneurship Development (SEED), into its work. The same team of researchers who completed the 4-year evaluation of Educate! also studied the impacts of SEED, a three-week intensive mini-MBA program implemented at-scale as a randomized controlled trial immediately following high school completion. SEED builds on Educate!'s soft skills curriculum and is modeled after western business school curricula that were adapted to the Ugandan context. A recent three-year follow-up study of SEED showed

that it led to improvements in youth's skills and economic outcomes (e.g., wages, likelihood of starting a business, business survival, etc.). Overall, SEED led approximately to a 31 percent increase in cumulative youth earnings over the 3.5 years.

Educate! serves as a model for other organizations because of its commitment to generating and applying rigorous evidence, whether from evaluations of its own programs or from those of similar interventions, to ensure greater and sustained impact for the youth. The policy relevance of the evidence generated is significant. Educate! is in the process of scaling its model and working with nearly 50,000 youth through its direct delivery programs and reaching as many as 500,000 students through its education reform partnerships in Uganda, Rwanda, and Kenya, with plans to replicate its model across Sub-Saharan Africa.

This research was made possible through funding from the Hewlett Foundation via CEGA's Behavioral Economics in Reproductive Health Initiative (BERI), the Global Innovation Fund (GIF), IPA's Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Initiative, and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.