

# Flake, Allyson

## Mukono District, Uganda Secondary Schools: Equity and Importance of Resources

Faculty Mentor: Steven Hite, Educational Leadership and Foundations

The Ugandan government has limited knowledge of the location and situation of many of its secondary schools. This lack of knowledge inhibits proper management of the schools and appropriate distribution of funding. Secondary schools often have disproportionate resource access, which leads to variance in school quality and performance. Physical, financial and human resources are of critical importance to secondary schools yet these resources are scarce for most Ugandan schools. In order to improve school performance and raise national test scores for students, schools must gain access to these resources. The research conducted this summer in Mukono District, Uganda focused on discovering the current resource status at the secondary schools.

I adapted my research focus significantly once I arrived in Uganda. Instead of focusing on the use of geographic technologies in locating and evaluating schools, I led a team of ten student researchers in conducting interviews among school administrators concerning their resource strengths and weaknesses. This was a major adjustment but I enjoyed my leadership role and the interaction with administrators as well as with the research team. Although the research was challenging, my mentors were very helpful. I had the opportunity to work closely with professors and graduate students in the research process.

Our survey recorded quantitative data on the selected secondary schools' physical, financial, and human assets. We also recorded qualitative observations in our field journals and were often asked by administrators to speak with the student body about our research and about life in the United States. The survey consisted of three separate sections. This reduced the time spent at each school and solicited the answers from the appropriate administrator. We began by piloting the survey with three schools which were randomly selected from our list of UNEB (Uganda National Examinations Board) testing centers. This piloting process was crucial to the successful development of the survey. Not only were we able to reduce the time spent from 3 ½ hours per school to 1½ hours but also the survey was adapted for relevance and cultural variables.

The data collected during the summer is still being entered into a database and analyzed. With over eighty schools surveyed and more than five hundred hours of data collection, the amount of information available for analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the data collected this summer will of great consequence to the Ugandan government as well as future educational research. The data will show where inadequacies may be found and whether these inadequacies are impacted by such factors as school size, age, funding, etc. Through statistical correlation of school performance to the varying resources, it will be possible to see which resources are most critical to school performance. This knowledge will aid the Ugandan government in its future allocation of resources and perhaps in the development of its National Exams.

By the end of my fourth month in Uganda I was quite knowledgeable concerning the secondary school resources in Mukono District. The reasons for and consequences of resource insufficiency were apparent well before the data analysis stage of my research commenced. For example, as I traveled throughout the country, I began to notice that those schools which had no electricity had running water or a library. In addition, it became clear that a correlation existed between the lack of electricity and the high student to teacher ratio and unavailability of a school nurse. As I continued to make observations, I concluded that access to electricity was the most critical of all the physical resources we measured.

Conducting research in Uganda requires patience and adaptability. As the student leader of the Secondary Resource Survey, I was given the responsibility of managing the research team as well as aiding the director, Josh Rew, in data organization. My research partner, Jackie Skinner, and I were also the “long distance team”, so we traveled to outlying areas of the district. Most of my schools were accessible only by motorcycle. I walked many hours climbing muddy hills in the wet season or squinting in the unrelenting dust of the dry season. I would spend up to twelve hours a day riding a “boda-boda” searching for schools in a country with no road signs or maps and with natives too nice to tell you when you are lost. However, despite the unpredictability of the research, I appreciated it as an adventure and opportunity to see the beauty of Uganda. Rarely was there a dull moment.

The most rewarding experiences I had this summer was my interaction with the administrators and students at the dozens of secondary schools I visited. I was able to develop meaningful relationships and discuss important educational issues, current events, and US-Ugandan relations. The lessons I learned in Uganda will help me in my future educational pursuits. The research conducted will hopefully have lasting benefits to the Ugandan educational system.

Now that I have returned to BYU, I have begun working for Dr. Julie Hite, Educational Leadership and Foundations. I am currently her Undergraduate Research Trainee (URT). I am leading the organization and transcription of data collected on a different project this summer, Primary School Networking in Uganda. However, as I have dealt with this research, my knowledge of the Ugandan school system and research methods has broadened. My continuing involvement in the research conducted in Uganda promises to further my understanding and interest in the topic of education in Africa.