

THE DOUBLE BENEFITS OF THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT TRAINING PROGRAM AT UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Uganda's largest population is made up of young people under the age of 18 years yet majority of them are experiencing poor growth and development under the care of human capital that has no interest, lacks skills and knowledge to work with children. In this paper I present the double benefits of the child development training program at Uganda Christian University. Based on analysis and reflection of student internship reports, student course assessment reports and classroom experiences, I discuss the benefits of training in ECD to children and to the trainees. The paper concludes that one of the most important investments for African countries such as Uganda is to build capacity of child care workers since it is not only beneficial to the child worker but also to the child. The paper recommends the need for universities and training institutions to seek partnership in providing broad effective quality training for child workers.

KEY WORDS

Child development, quality, training, human capital

INTRODUCTION

Few study programs in Uganda have reported on the double benefits of investing in early childhood development. Uganda Christian University (UCU) is the first University in Uganda to design a training program in holistic child development. The purpose of this paper is to share from my experiences as a lecturer the benefits of having a training program in child development. The experiences shared in this paper are based on my interaction with the trainees during teaching periods, visits to internship placements, analysis of field work reports and training assessment reports. But first before I present the benefits of the program at Uganda Christian University in this section, I present the situation analysis of children and child workers in Uganda which I argue warrants a skilled and knowledgeable workforce to deal with.

Situation analysis of children and child workers in Uganda

More than half of Uganda's children are living in poverty. Under nutrition accounts for 40 % of child deaths in Uganda while Malaria, diarrhea and infections like HIV account for more than 70% of under-five deaths. One-third of under-fives (2.4 million) are stunted and more than 1 million are underweight. 38% of children are vitamin A deficient. 49% of children aged six months to four years are anaemic. 63% of babies are exclusively breastfed for the first six months (UNICEF 2015). The situation limits Ugandan children's opportunities to develop to their full potential. Often neither the care giver nor the child workers are aware of what to do to prevent or lessen the worst effects of disease, developmental defects and deformities (Richter 2004). On children's access to essential services and protection from harmful practices Uganda is ranked 136 out of 176. Millions of

children are still out of school, go to bed hungry, cannot access adequate healthcare, and suffer from child marriage and teen pregnancy (Save the children 2017)

The role of the care giver is to prepare an environment that will allow children to survive and thrive. Yet a child born in Uganda today is likely to die at birth because of being born in the hands of a child care worker who is not knowledgeable about child development, un skilled in assisting mothers to give birth, in the hands of a mother who never attended antenatal care or received post natal check up and in the hands of a community that does not encourage immunization. Child workers or carers lack knowledge on nutritious food to give children and to recommend for pregnant mothers.

The situation in school is not any different. The academic performance of children in school is terrible due to factors such as un skilled teaching staff , a large number of dissatisfied and demotivated bunch of teachers in both public and private schools. According to the UNICEF (2016) report only one in five primary school teachers are competent in English and Maths while 60% of teachers are not in school teaching. The report also indicated that Pupils' competency in literacy varies from between 12% and 93% at P3 depending on the district. 10% of children have to repeat years. This situation of children in Uganda calls for key interventions such as child development training.

THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AT UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

The broad objective of the child development program at Uganda Christian University (UCU) is to build capacity of child workers through instilling attitude, beliefs, knowledge and practices that support children's growth and development. The program is expected to empower child workers in ways that will improve their care and interaction with children and enrich the immediate environment within which children live (Evans 2002).

The department of child development at UCU employs a holistic approach to improving the lives of children. This is because the program offers training to cater for the children's cognitive needs, social needs, physical needs and psychological needs. The program does not only focus on building capacity of child workers but also on improving the lives of the children around and within their care. The students offering the program are from within Uganda and internationally. The program gives them an opportunity to develop their knowledge base and skill in child care work through offering a bachelor in child development and masters in holistic child development at the main campus in Mukono. The program is structured to effectively provide two semesters for internship. When trainees finish 2nd and third year they are sent to the field to work with children in organizations of their choice. The intention is to put the knowledge and skill learnt in the program to practice.

Some of the knowledge and skills provided in the program include children and the law, early childhood intervention, child counseling, childhood research methodology, child assessment and intervention, project planning and development, child development theories and processes, youth ministry, children at risk, trainer of trainers, curriculum development for children, child development in context, sign language, children with special needs, community development entrepreneurship ([www. Uganda Christian University.com](http://www.Uganda Christian University.com))

OPPORTUNITIES OF THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AT UCU

The child development program at UCU benefits both children and the students. In this section I first explain the benefits of the program to students then later explain benefits of the program to the children in the community. The program benefits the trainees through

getting promotions at work, job offers, improved work place performance and some pocket money while still at the University.

Promotions at work place

Analysis of students email and watsup interactions, indicated that the students were getting promotions at their work place based on the training attained at UCU. One such report was a work promotion for one of auminis as indicated in the watsup excerpts below.

Rona: Join me to congratulate our brother simon upon a promotion. He is now DCDO Bundibugyo

Simon: It was the only relevant programme for the job...panel was happy

Commissioner who interviewed us was impressed by the MACD especially disability ...he linked them to disability grant in local governments (Watsup communication with Rona and Simon)

According to the excerpt above Simon an alumni of the program was given a promotion because he had the right qualification most relevant for the job position. He came to the program as a probation officer but after completion he was promoted to DCDO. This is only one example of the many promotions are former student enjoy after participating in the program.

Improved work place performance

The students' performance at work place has also improved due to the training. The child development training at UCU includes training on how to create e-books for children. The rationale is that additional information technology skills will be instrumental in giving them an upper age in finding jobs or improving on job performance. Indeed as indicated below one of my students who later got employed narrated the story of how the skill of creating E-book is helping her at the workplace.

As a professional child worker now, the skills I attained from designing an E-book have helped me to use my computer as a resource! If a computer can be used to create an E-book, it can definitely be used to create more valuable things! From this idea therefore, I started designing a newsletter for my organization which comes out monthly. I have used the skills attained to also train teachers about a simpler and interesting way of learning. It does not have to always be on the blackboard! This has made learning enjoyable. The task of designing an e-book in the BCDCM class wasn't a task of giving me fish but a task of teaching me how to fish (Email excerpt from Daphine)

Job opportunities

I have also received email messages from students who have got job opportunities even sometimes before finish of the program. In the excerpt below two students are excited to tell me about a possible job opportunity and a real job opportunity.

*Good evening dear Madam,
I hope I you are doing well and you have had a blessed Palm Sunday. I had not told that last week I got a job offer in the UK to go and work as an Assistant family Worker. The email is from one of the people who interviewed me and he is requesting*

*to read through my Dissertation after I finish. In the interview I had mentioned that I am doing my dissertation and is more about building a family-friendly youth ministry. Will talk more when we next meet
Blessed Holy Week*

This student got a job which was connected or related with the dissertation he was writing. Simon was writing a report on relational leadership in the youth ministry at his church hence scooping the job opportunity. Another student below was promised a job opportunity based on the child care skills exemplified during internship.

World Vision wrote for me a recommendation letter in recognition of my work with them for 10 weeks. This recommendation is now part of my curriculum vitae....Besides they also promise to call me every time there is an opportunity (DA)

It is quite clear from the excerpt above that the program has enabled Simon to get a job in his area of interest. Again this is just one example of the report written to me by students who have got jobs after training in the program.

Building self-esteem in students

Some of the students also reported development in their self-esteem after undergoing the training especially after the experiencing internship placement. In the excerpt below one of my students in her field work report indicated that she gained confidence in working with children

The fieldwork had a big impact on my self-esteem in that it helped me gain a lot of confidence. As I carried out the various tasks, I normally received complements from my supervisor, fellow interns.....community volunteers about how i was good facilitator....i intend to start advertising myself as a motivational speaker as a child worker....and this will be an employment opportunity for me.

Financial benefits

Some students also indicated gaining financially from field work placements. In the excerpt below one student narrates how she was able to make some money with the skills she gained from the programe.

I had an opportunity to make money during internship. Sometimes I was paid to facilitate trainings for the children and community volunteers. With this money I was able to meet some of my basic needs.

Internship placements were therefore very good opportunities for some students to get some income which could be used to cater for their financial needs while still at the University.

BENEFITS OF THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM TO CHILDREN

Physical, spiritual, emotional, social and cognitive needs of the children were met because of their interaction and engagement with the UCU child development students. As indicated in the excerpt below one of my students reported showing love to the children experiencing extreme poverty by playing and having social gatherings with them.

I came face to face with reality of poverty....I saw children walking bare footed to school, go without meals, no books, pens, pencils or even school uniform...every time that I worked with the children was an opportunity to minister to them...everything I did was ministry be it playing with them....helping them to choose their leaders, have fun with them....it was ministry at heart...I must say that every time I went for field work I was exposed to children's ministry.(Amuda Mercy 2018)

This field work gave me an opportunity to practically serve children in very poor communities. I had to minister to them by showing love practically. This involved coming down to the level of the people in the communities by eating with them, speaking their language and listening to them. I also had to be patient, kind, loving, understanding and humble (Akiteng Debroah 2018)

I also used counseling skills especially as I worked with the children in the world vision clusters. Most of these children have undergone abuse and therefore need someone to talk to and encourage them. Most of them also suffer inferiority complex.

In the report above child development students offered counseling and all sorts of psycho social support to children they met or worked with during internship placement.

Children expressed themselves

Child development students used child friendly methodologies to work with children and to help the children to express themselves freely. For example in the report below one of the students used the drawing technique learnt in the child in context course unit.

Child in context taught me..... Through these lessons I learnt that sometimes it not wise to force children to talk about themselvesbut rather give them a piece of paper and pencil to draw...Besides drawing helped me to work with all categories of children including those with special needs like the deaf.

Introduction to child development taught me benefits of play so I always used to play in my various tasks.....I knew just how to get their attention and cooperation....The children also loved me for this and always looked forward to more sessions with me as a strong bond had been created.....The children found this exciting, emotionally involving...it is also very easy for children to remember messages that are conveyed dramatically

Family tracing and reunification

Counseling, family tracing and reunification is taught to the child development students in the child protection course unit. In the excerpt below, one of my students tells a story of how the child development training has helped him to change lives of the children in the community.

.....The best examples will be from my two internships the first being with Heroes boys in Kampala. These are street boys whom I worked with almost three months in 2017.

During my time with the boys I applied counseling skill gained from my child counseling lectures and also my PARACOUNSELLING experience. For the three months I was able to see a number boys get resettled with their families, and others going back to school. A good example is Rayan and Smart wire as we called him who were both resettled with their families and at the same time started school again.

In is very interesting to note that the child development students above were able to apply the knowledge learnt in class to counsel and reunite children with their families.

Children get chance to go to school

Some children in the community were also able to gain education or go back to school because of the assistance from child development students. In the excerpt below Simon a child development student narrates how he and his friend Steven were helping a child from the community.

The last experience I want to share is the intervention me and my course mate Steve we did by taking Jonah and Nazziwa back to school something we are still doing now. These are two children in Kirowoza-Mukono whom we are helping with their school fees.

DISCUSSION

In the section above UCU students of child development gained from the child development training and also brought change in the lives of the children they worked with during internship. During internship the students were able provide responsive care to children through making judgment by monitoring the child's movements, expressions, colour, temperature and the like (Ritcher 2004). Through this responsive care children's emotional, physical, social and cognitive needs were met. This finding relates to similar findings in the discipline of child care where research has shown that, the support children get from caregivers has an impact on their health and overall growth. The child's growth, in all aspects of health and personhood, depends on the capacity of adults, in whose care the child rests, to understand, perceive and respond to the child's bids for assistance and support (Ritcher 2004).

Similarly a study done by Chen et al (2016) showed that programs that trained care givers such as parents successfully reduced substantiated and self-reported child maltreatment reports and it also reduced the potential for child maltreatment. The programs also reduced risk factors and enhanced protective factors associated with child maltreatment.

Another study done by Burchinal et al (2002) on caregiver training and classroom quality in child care centers, indicated that care givers with formal education in early children or who attended workshops were rated as more sensitive in interactions with children and as providing higher quality care than other caregivers, Furthermore, children in those caregivers' classes also had more advanced language skills if caregivers reported either formal or informal training. This findings are also similar to Belsky et al .(2007), that showed that much as parenting was a stronger predictor of children's development, quality care predicated higher vocabulary scores.

It therefore seems clear from the findings of the UCU program and other studies that capacity building in child care leads to positive child outcomes and trainee outcomes hence public investment in such programs must be promoted on the grounds that they can produce high rates of return in the form of academic outcomes, greater employment rates, and better health outcomes. (Barnett et al 2006). My experience of the training program suggests that improving capacity of child workers can be a useful method for improving the life conditions of children.

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