



The African SOUP's Active Learning Project: A Scalable Approach to Education Driven by Community Impact

The African SOUP Organizational Overview: The African SOUP is a burgeoning educational organization that takes after the fabled "Stone Soup" story. Inspired by the initiatives and drive of the local village in which we are rooted, the SOUP exists to provide a hand-up, not a hand-out, working in tandem with the community to address its most vital needs.

As a result of this human-centered design approach to community impact, The African SOUP scaled beyond our local programs in eastern Uganda to address the gap of students who start primary school yet fail to complete it. This national program, known as the Active Learning Project (ALP), was started within the SOUP's primary school in Nabikabala Village to address an immediate need to create experiential learning opportunities for all types of learners (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), so that each pupil had the knowledge potential to advance beyond primary school.

Traditional methods of education in Uganda include rote memorization and a lecture-based approach, which can be difficult for early learners to understand and synthesize information, especially those who are not just auditory learners. This current approach leads to high failure rates and diminished engagement in the classroom, and it was clear that this was not just a local challenge, rather a system issue that was plaguing students across Uganda.

The active learning approach to education couples innovative teaching methods with local curricula and materials in order to address the needs of children who learn differently. By embedding this proven method of active learning methodology within Uganda's primary school curriculum, teachers depart from traditional methods of teaching and engage pupils across critical analysis, creative thinking, and ethical behavior developmental domains. The development of these skillsets can in turn improve primary school retention rates, graduation rates, and pupil test scores, while simultaneously impacting teacher satisfaction and efficacy.

Through partnerships with local primary schools and government programs, the SOUP has expanded the ALP to 20 primary schools in the Namutumba District of eastern Uganda and provided training programs to local educators, school administrators, and government officials. The ALP has immense national potential, as it arose not from an outside organization's opinion on how to transform education in Uganda, but from our community roots and needs in Nabikabala Village, and is fully Ugandan-led and -driven.

System Problem: With 70% of the Ugandan population under the age of 24, the students in primary school today are in the pipeline to become the next generation of leaders, entrepreneurs, and voices of Uganda. But with less than 20% of pupils advancing onto secondary school, there is a distinct demand by the Ugandan government to improve the quality and delivery of education;

The [net and gross completion rates] reflect persistently high class repetition and drop-out rates, which can be attributed to factors both on the supply-side (the quality of schools) and the demand-side (such as economic obligations, parental attitudes to education and early marriages)... Nonetheless, concerns regarding education quality have persisted, with primary school test results suggesting the improvement in education standards may have slowed over the last five years. This is attributed to insufficient infrastructure and learning materials, but more importantly low motivation among teachers and school managers and weak compliance with set service delivery standards (Uganda Millennium Development Goals Report, 2015).



Tandi Clausen-May and Remegious Baaleo of Uganda's National Curriculum Development Centre write in their article *Mathematics curriculum reform in Uganda – what works in the classroom?* that in the primary classrooms in Uganda,

Most learners may be able to copy down what the teacher writes on the blackboard and learn it off by heart but, in all but a few highly selective schools, it will make very little sense to many of them... There is a strong habit of dependence on the teacher in Ugandan... classrooms, fostered by a heavy diet of didactic, teacher-focused classroom practice and a lack of independent learner access to textbooks and resources.

Innovative Solution: In response to the 2015 Millennium Development Goals Report and the major concerns listed above, the Ugandan government developed a five-year plan called the Second National Development Plan (NDPII) 2015/16 – 2019/20 to help Uganda stay on track to reach the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Within this five-year plan, the first two Educational Objectives are 1) to achieve equitable access to relevant and quality education and training and 2) to ensure delivery of relevant and quality education and training.

To meet this demand, The African SOUP is scaling our successful approach to primary education – the implementation of the active learning methodology – nationwide. Our rural primary school saw a 100% graduation rate for its Primary 7 class in 2015 and an 86% graduation rate in our inaugural 2014 class, compared to a 20% average national graduation rate. This approach engages students in meaningful learning activities to construct knowledge for themselves. It is important to note that incorporating this methodology offers no departure from current Ugandan curriculum. Rather, this methodology is embedded into the Ugandan curriculum, and teachers simply approach the same material in a more effective and engaging manner. Active learning emphasizes higher order skills, such as creative thinking, critical analysis, and ethical behavior, and serves as the ideal bridge to transfer the content of the curriculum to the learner, ultimately increasing pupil understanding and improving performance on exams.

Case for Active Learning Project: The concept of active learning is not new to education, in fact it is a consistent, recurring theme in education theory often highlighted by educational experts. However, it has not been viewed as a valuable tool in Uganda's primary educational system until recently. It is rarely practiced in Ugandan classrooms today due to the legacy of a colonial-based school system that emphasizes passive learning and test results as opposed to comprehension and student engagement.

John Dewey described the importance of the interaction between activity, objects, people, curricular topics, the mind and hands. He reinforced the concept that learning is an active process that is reinforced within the context of social relationships. (Dewey, 1916). Dewey rejected the idea that schools and teachers should focus on repetitive, rote memorization and proposed that students engage in practical hands-on activities that would allow them to test theories and demonstrate their knowledge in a creative process. He believed that education should be grounded in real experience. Lev Vygotsky believed that students are active not passive learners (Vygotsky, 1962).

Pilot Phase: Recognizing the challenges that accompany a passive learning educational system, including a high failure rate, The African SOUP launched the Active Learning Project soft pilot in 2015 with a hard pilot currently underway in 2016. By actively engaging the pupil in the learning process, the SOUP is revolutionizing the way education is taught in Uganda. We are currently working with 20 partner schools in eastern Uganda, as well as engaging district education officials and members of Bishop Willis Primary Core Teacher Training College. Throughout both pilots, research has shown the following positive results:

- A noticeable increase in teacher engagement and excitement towards the delivery of the curriculum



- Greater excitement from children in ALP classrooms; Noticeable decrease in boredom among students; Noticeable increase in school attendance
- Students engaged in lessons: From asking questions to assisting the teacher in finding materials for future lesson plans, the pupils became empowered to assist in their own education
- Increased confidence in learners to express themselves. When a student was given the opportunity to answer a question or present an idea, the teacher encouraged the student and the student became more confident about his or her ability to decipher, comprehend, and innovate
- Increased identification of natural skills and individual talents of pupils in the classroom due to individual and small group work – which students can lead, draw, create, or innovate, thereby nurturing those skills further, something they had not seen when the class was taught in its entirety
- Relationships between teacher and child increased as students started to feel more comfortable expressing challenges
- Improvement in teacher research for lesson planning
- Increased use of environmental and natural resources
- Increased communication regarding lesson planning among teachers

ALP Strategic Plan: In response to this promising data, The African SOUP solidified a five-year trilateral partnership between (1) The African SOUP, (2) Georgia State University's Early Childhood and Elementary Education Department within the College of Education and Human Development, and (3) Bishop Willis Primary Core Teacher Training College in Iganga, Uganda, to help guide us in research and active partnerships across the world. The African SOUP's primary school will serve as a model for all schools (inclusive of the 20 existing partner schools), and will act as a demonstration site for schools new to the implementation process.

The Cubit Family Foundation recently awarded the SOUP a two-year \$50,000 grant to scale the Active Learning Project by building out partnerships and implement a new impact study on a grander scale. This generous grant is supplemented by operational funding for all of our programs from the Segal Family Foundation, various other grantors, individual giving, and fundraising events hosted in the United States each year.

In 2017, we will commence a program scale-up across Uganda, strategically partnering with various government Primary Teacher Training Colleges (PTCs) and Core PTCs, which coordinate district activities and oversee Center Coordinating Tutors, who provide continuous professional development for teachers already in the classroom. We also hope to partner with 20 schools in each of the four regions (80 total schools) who will adopt the Active Learning methodology.

Throughout this multi-year study, we will measure program outcomes to include teacher evaluations, comparing intervention pupil test scores with control group pupil test scores, pupil attendance data, and secondary school enrollment data from treated and non-treated primary schools, amongst various other qualitative outcomes. The data gathered from this diverse sampling of schools and PTCs, including government, private, urban, and rural, over a multi-year evaluation period will showcase the efficacy of this program and serve as a launching pad for national implementation.

Our desired final outcome in the coming years is to achieve full national adoption of active learning as the mandated pedagogy of teaching in Uganda. We believe this will have positive residual effects throughout the primary educational system and can, more than ever before, set Ugandan youth up for success to become the next generation of leaders in their country, and help the country reach its 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.