



Precarious values in publicly funded religious schools: The effects of government-aid on the institutional character of Ugandan Catholic schools



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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores the effect of government aid and related policies on the institutional character of Catholic secondary schools in Uganda. Private Catholic and government aided Catholic schools showed a clear and coherent institutional identity that fosters a positive school culture. However, Catholic school autonomy and identity are constrained by state policy, especially in government aided Catholic schools. Government control over selection of personnel and students in government aided schools affects mission alignment, goals and values, and perceptions of responsibility. Resource scarcity and leadership are key factors that affect the degree of state influence. This study suggests that further research should consider the relationship between autonomy and school climate and culture, especially in faith-based schools.

1. Introduction

According to Calderisi (2013), 30–50% of health and education services in many developing countries are provided by the Catholic Church, which has played a particularly central role in the development of African education systems. Research in the US has identified a “Catholic school effect,” noting that Catholic schools foster comparatively stronger academic and civic outcomes compared to public schools and identify various organizational characteristics that help explain their relative effectiveness (Coleman et al., 1982; Cibulka et al., 1982; Greeley, 1982; Coleman et al., 1987; Bryk et al., 1993; Jencks, 1985; Convey, 1992; Neal, 1997; Evans and Schwab, 1995; Hallinan, 2000). However, despite the scope of the Church’s work in education in developing countries, these questions have received little attention in such contexts (Grace and O’Keefe, 2007). The study of Catholic school effects fits within a broader literature on school effectiveness, which explores how school factors impact student outcomes. While research in developed countries has long considered both differences in inputs (i.e. funding and resources) and organizational factors (i.e. leadership and school climate), the former has tended to predominate in research in developing countries. Recent studies have begun to focus more on the organizational and process characteristics in schools in low-income countries, though these have not examined how religious sponsorship affects school organizational characteristics. In other words, little is known about the extent to which and how a religious or Catholic school effect might be operating in the African context.

Research on effective schools in low-income countries emphasizes

the need to be attentive to context. So, how might the contextual differences between African countries and the United States affect the institutional characteristics of Catholic schools? One notable issue is the divergent policy contexts. Little is known about how diverse policy contexts affect the character of faith-based schools. Catholic schools in the United States have historically enjoyed a large degree of autonomy from the state (Bryk et al., 1993), while autonomy of private and religious schools appear to vary widely across national contexts (Grace and O’Keefe, 2007). Following independence, many African governments took control over religious schools, subsequently allowing only limited influence of Church organizations in schools (Carmody, 2007, 2012; Heyneman, 1975). Thus, state influence may constrain the autonomy of faith-based schools in Africa, perhaps affecting their institutional character and impacting their effectiveness. Exploring the differences between these forms of Catholic schools is important to understanding Catholic education in many African contexts and offers insights on the relationship between public policy, faith-based schools, and key organizational characteristics linked to school effectiveness.

This study will focus on Uganda as a country case study to begin exploring these questions in sub-Saharan Africa. Uganda has 5172 “Catholic schools” comprising 24% of the system (MoESTS Statistical Abstract, 2015). Following independence the government took-over most managerial and administrative functions of the then existing Church founded schools (Heyneman, 1975) and religious groups eventually began to open new, fully private religious schools. The result is that Uganda now has two types of Catholic schools, government-aided, Church-founded schools, which include those that were

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appropriated by the state after independence or have later opted to receive public funding, and fully private Catholic schools, which have more autonomy from the state and do not receive government funding.

This study will examine the institutional characteristics of both government aided and private Catholic secondary schools in Uganda, seeking to address the following questions: To what extent and in what ways do the institutional characteristics of both types of Catholic schools in Uganda appear to reflect or differ from those of Catholic schools in the United States? Secondly, how has government funding and influence affected the organizational character of both types of Ugandan Catholic secondary schools?

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. School effectiveness research

This study fits within the literature on school effects and school effectiveness. This line of research began with Coleman's work on educational opportunity in what is known as the *Coleman Report* (1966), which found that the socio-economic and family background of students in the U.S. explained more of their academic achievement than did variations in school quality. The Coleman Report was similar to a line of economic research on educational production functions referred to as input-output studies. Such studies examine which inputs can increase outputs in student academic achievement and has tended to predominate in education research in low-income countries with few studies including organizational, instructional, and process variables (Scheerens, 2000). Heyneman and Loxley's (1983) study of primary school student achievement across twenty-nine countries is a prominent example. They found that variations in school inputs explain more of the differences in student achievement than family background in low-income countries, while in wealthier countries family background explains more than school differences. Reviews of school effectiveness research in developing countries point to the following school factors as impacting student outcomes: higher levels of teacher education and content knowledge, teacher experience and social class, spending per pupil, school facilities, availability of textbooks and other materials, nutritional programs, instructional time and days per year, indicators of rigor and support (i.e. homework, monitoring pupil performance), and effective instructional leadership and management (Fuller and Clarke, 1994; Hanushek, 1995; Scheerens, 2000).

Partially in reaction to production function research, a line of research in developed countries emerged on effective schools that emphasize the organizational, instructional, and process characteristics that influence student achievement. These factors include: a mission driven vision and organizational culture, an achievement orientation and culture of high expectations, positive student-teacher relationships and sense of community, staff cooperation and professional community, school leadership focused on instruction, curriculum, and staff professional development, monitoring and evaluation of student progress, and the effective use of instructional time (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988; Bryk et al., 2000, 2010; Cotton, 1995; Hattie, 2008; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Murphy, 2015; Murphy and Torre, 2014; Purkey and Smith, 1983; Sammons, Hillman, and Mortimore, 1995; Scheerens, 1992).

Recent research in sub-Saharan Africa has emerged showing considerable consistency with the findings on effective schools from developed countries (Verspoor, 2006). In addition to the factors emphasized in production function research noted above, these studies focus on organizational, pedagogical, cultural, and contextual factors that affect outcomes. These include: an effective and orderly school climate, a culture of high expectations, effective and supportive leadership, collegial work relations, effective teaching methods, student assessment and monitoring, parent and community involvement, and consideration of the local context, culture, and language of instruction (Cheng, 1996; Fertig, 2000; Fuller and Clarke, 1994; Heneveld, 1994; Heneveld and Craig, 1996; Levin et al., 1993; Scheerens, 2001; Scheerens and Bosker,

1997; Yu, 2007). Various scholars also point to the need to ground school effectiveness research in specific cultural and policy contexts and employ methods like multi-level analysis and qualitative case studies to more fully understand organizational factors, processes, norms, and values that influence student outcomes (Carrim, 1999; Fertig, 2000; Fuller and Clarke, 1994; Saunders, 2000; Yu, 2007).

2.2. Catholic school effects

Also emerging from a study by James Coleman in the 1980s was a line of research in the United States on "school effects," mostly focused on comparing private, Catholic and public schools. This research suggested there are institutional and organizational characteristics of Catholic schools that make them comparatively more effective in fostering academic achievement and attainment, especially for low-income students (Coleman et al., 1982; Cibulka et al., 1982; Greeley, 1982; Jencks, 1985; Bryk et al., 1993, 1997; Evans and Schwab, 1995; Hallinan, 2000). More recent evidence, however, suggests that these effects may be less evident at the elementary school level (Carbonaro, 2006; Hallinan and Kubitschek, 2010; Reardon et al., 2009) and may be fading due to social and political factors affecting Catholic schools (Freeman and Berends, 2016). Evidence from the U.S. also suggests that private schools, especially Catholic schools, better promote civic participation and political tolerance than public schools (Greeley and Rossi, 1966; Greene, 1998; Campbell, 2001; Wolf et al., 2001; Dee, 2004).

However, questions about the role of Catholic schools have been given limited attention in developing country contexts (Grace and O'Keefe, 2007). Recent studies from developing countries, instead, have focused primarily on the growth of private schools and examined the role of competition, markets, and decentralization (Barungi, Wokadala, and Kasirye, 2015; Osorio et al., 2009; Tooley, 2013; Tooley and Dixon, 2006; Heyneman, 2014). This research largely ignores the institutional characteristics of sub-groups among non-government schools (i.e. faith-based and Catholic schools).

Some research suggests there may be a Catholic school effect in some developing countries. Research on a national voucher program in Chile (McEwan and Carnoy, 2000) and an evaluation of a large-scale network of Catholic schools for the poor called *Fe y Alegria* in Venezuela (Osorio et al., 2009) point to a Catholic school effect in some Latin American countries. A study of faith-based schools in Sierra Leone (Wodon and Ying, 2009) suggests that faith-based schools achieve higher academic outcomes for students than public schools. A study of faith-based schools in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Backiny-Yetna and Wodon, 2009), however, found no differences in performance between faith-based and public schools. Heyneman and Loxley's (1983) study of 29 high and low-income countries found a religious schools effect in Uganda as one of the many variables that predicted higher academic outcomes.

In sum, there appears to be some evidence of a possible faith-based or Catholic school effect in some developing countries, yet this question has received too little attention to draw definitive conclusions. As these questions are explored further it will be important to consider the mechanisms that might explain possible religious school effects, drawing upon school effectiveness research, and how these school level conditions might be influenced by changes in the policy and cultural context. In terms of the existing knowledge base on Catholic school characteristics, I rely on the research from the U.S. to ground this inquiry, as it is by far the most robust and there is very little empirical, comparative work on these questions for developing country contexts.

2.3. Institutional factors explaining Catholic school effects

In their seminal book on Catholic schools in the U.S., *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, Bryk et al. (1993) used a mixed-methods study to explore the organizational and institutional characteristics of

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